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OR
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OR
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BY
VIOLET FANE,
AUTHOR OF 'DENZIL PLACE,' 'ANTHONY BABINGTON,
'THE EDWIN AND ANGELINA PAPERS,'
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.




LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13 GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1881.

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251. i. 455.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY STRANGEWAYS AND SONS,
Tower Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane.



SOPHY,

OR THE ADVENTURES OF A SAVAGE.



PROLOGUE

‘ When we were girl and boy together,
We tossed about the flowers,
And wreathed the blushing hours
Into a posy green and sweet. . . .’—T. L. BEDDOES.

CHAPTER I.

SOME fifty or sixty years ago, Henry Fauntleroy, banker, was hanged for forgery; and a few days after this melancholy event, in an old country house in the south of England, a beautiful young lady, whom even the *gigot* sleeves and unbecoming headgear of the period failed to disfigure, was reading aloud an account of his execution from one of the leading journals.

Her chief listener was a man so much older than herself that he might have been taken for her father, nay, his antiquated style of dress might even have misled a stranger into believing that he was a generation further removed from the girl who sat at his feet, crumpling the newspaper in her pretty hands. But one of those hands (the left one), besides a diamond and emerald ‘hoop’ (a hoop which in those days went all round the finger, causing exquisite pain whenever the hand was cordially squeezed—the reason, perhaps,

why modern jewellers have abandoned this manner of setting), was adorned with a wedding-ring; and the young lady was, in reality, the wife of the old gentleman, who, with his knee-breeches and frilled *jabot*, looked like a living impersonation of some one of the portraits in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, or Voltaire himself resuscitated. Her other unsuspected listener was a little boy of some seven years of age, with tawny hair cut straight across his forehead, and lapping down on each side of his face like the ears of a King Charles's spaniel, which animal he very much resembled, with his great dark eyes and short baby features. All at once, this child, stopping in the midst of his play, knocked down the castle of wooden bricks which he had been raising with such care, and running towards the pretty lady, buried his fluffy head in her black satin apron, and burst into a flood of tears.

'What is the matter, Godfrey?' demanded she, in a sterner voice than that in which young mothers are wont to address an only child, whilst the old gentleman walked quickly towards the bell, which he rang several times.

The little boy was still weeping, but this action on the part of Mr. St. Clair—such was the name of the old gentleman—recalled him apparently to reason, and holding up his head, he answered, in a subdued voice,—

'I don't know, mamma.'

'*You do not know?*' repeated Mr. St. Clair, looking at him firmly but benevolently. 'Are you unable to give any reason for this sudden outburst?'

'Indeed I cannot tell,' persisted the little boy. 'I cannot tell what made me cry.'

'Nothing is without a reason,' said Mrs. St. Clair; and she then added, making a movement with her knee,

'lift up your head, dear; your tears are dripping all over my apron, and will spoil it;' and, indeed, the apron seemed too pretty to spoil, as it was embroidered with rosebuds and forget-me-nots in floss silk.

'There is a cause for everything that exists in the universe,' said the boy's father.

'Indeed I don't know what it was,' repeated little Godfrey, now no longer sobbing.

'I am sorry, Godfrey, that you should add falsehood to passion,' said Mrs. St. Clair, sternly.

'Search your mind, Godfrey,' urged his father, with mild insistence; and he then added to his wife, in a lower voice, 'It is very important to the ultimate success of our system, that we should inquire into both cause and effect, and thus endeavour to strike at the first fell germ of rising evil.'

'If I *did* say,' pleaded the little boy, as though after a sudden resolution, 'you would be sure to laugh at me.'

'And supposing that we laughed, it could only be because you were deserving of ridicule,' answered his father, sententiously.

'The desire to escape being laughed at springs generally from an inordinate self-love,' added Mrs. St. Clair.

'Well, then,' said the child, firmly, 'when mamma began reading about the person that was hung, I didn't listen; but next I *did* listen, and then I got to pity him, and to be sorry for the bad thing he did; and then I thought p'raps he didn't mean to do it, and wouldn't do it again; and then I thought, whether he was good or not, it was a dreadful thing that they should kill him; and when I heard that he was called "Fauntleroy," it was such a pretty name that I couldn't help crying. This is the real truth.'

‘You are fretful and excitable,’ said Mrs. St. Clair. ‘Perhaps he is not well, and ought to have something to take?’ she added, appealing to the superior wisdom of her husband.

‘No,’ muttered the old gentleman, who, after adjusting his glasses, had scrutinised his son’s face as though he had been some curious specimen in natural history; ‘the child seems to be in excellent health.’

‘This man was a forger,’ said Mrs. St. Clair, again addressing herself to the boy; ‘and it was quite right that good people should hang him. *Murderers, forgers, and all bad men, always are hanged;*’ and she looked significantly at her husband.

‘Not always, not always, my dear,’ rejoined he. ‘Before the young we must always be careful to be just, guarding against any misstatement of facts But to return to the point:—You did not know this man, Godfrey, and you cannot therefore pretend to any affection for him. Were you to weep at the downfall of some hero I would join my tears to your own; but in this instance your emotion can only proceed from a morbid sentimentality. And as to the sound of his name having been, as I confess it was, euphonious, he would have deserved your sympathy as much, supposing him to have been a worthy person, had he inherited a more ordinary surname. This episode confirms me in my opinion that yours is a nature, my dear boy, capable of leaving a reality for a shadow.’

‘Like the dog in the fable?’ asked the little boy. ‘Oh, I shall try not to, papa.’

‘One cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear,’ murmured Mrs. St. Clair, in an aside to her husband.

‘I don’t know, my dear,’ he replied. ‘I know that such is your opinion. Time, however, will show. I believe *that one can*.’

The boy continued to hang his head, feeling that he was reprovèd, though the reason for his reproof was not quite so clear to him. Another moment, and the butler, entering in reply to the bell, demanded what were Mr. St. Clair’s orders.

‘Be good enough, Jamieson, to send Mary Parker here,’ said the old gentleman ; and very soon Godfrey’s nurse presented herself at the door. She was a good-natured-looking woman, with a wide mouth, a florid complexion, and honest eyes.

‘Another inexplicable fit of crying, Mary,’ Mrs. St. Clair said, pointing to her son.

‘Indeed, ma’am, I’m sorry to hear it,’ returned Mary Parker, looking at Godfrey reproachfully.

‘He has done nothing deserving of blame in itself,’ Godfrey’s father explained. ‘But, believing, as we do, that the first step towards improvement consists in the exercise of self-control, we are constrained upon the present occasion, for the good of our boy, to inflict some small punishment. Godfrey, you are relegated to your nursery, nor will you be permitted to come down stairs during the evening. Every extravagant exhibition of emotion may be controlled, and the hidden promoter of it resisted. Resist, and strength will come ;—this is the lesson I have endeavoured to impress upon you all—is it not, Mary ? and I trust I have done so in a manner incapable of offending even the most susceptible of my household.’

‘You have indeed, sir,’ answered Mary, in a grateful tone ; and then, turning to Godfrey, she said, kindly, ‘Perhaps you will come along with me, sir ?’

The boy needed no further bidding, and, taking his nurse's hand, he passed out from the presence of his parents, pondering, as he went, upon their trite copy-book sayings.

Hardly had the swing-door, which divided the entrance-hall from the servants' apartments, closed, when Mary Parker's manner underwent a sudden change. Covering her young charge with kisses, she broke forth at once into the language in which tender women are wont to address little children; and finally, after a thousand foolish words and promises, she insisted upon carrying him all the way up the steep stone stairs, at the head of which his nursery was situated, on her entrance into which she again commenced hugging and fondling him, and doing all in her power to efface from his mind the remembrance of the parental teaching.

Some time before Godfrey's usual bedtime upon this evening, Mary Parker, expecting, probably, a visit from Mrs. St. Clair, had placed him in his little canesided crib, peeping through the manifold holes in which he could see her as she passed to and fro setting his nursery in order for the night. Whilst she was partaking of supper in an adjoining room, he used, when the days were long, to lie awake watching the gray square of twilight through the two windows, across which were the five wooden bars set there to protect his tender years.

The dark Scotch firs at the further end of the flower-garden used to sway their heads slowly and mournfully in the evening breezes, each one seeming to him an old friend who was saying 'good night,' with a face full of sympathy and benevolence. For to little Godfrey the black fir-trees pos-

sessed faces. Profile after profile seemed to peep down at him from the window as he lay there dreaming awake in his little cane-sided crib, the outline of each one of them generally taking the wrong curves, like the head of George III. upon a spade guinea, where every line of the face is made to bulge outwards; whereas, as most people know who have had anything to do with 'High Art,' a well-regulated profile ought to curve in an exactly contrary direction, if, indeed, it *curves* at all: for, probably, it would be disposed at first in a series of sharp, square little angles, to be finished off afterwards with one of Nature's neatest chisels.

Amongst the branches of these old friends, Godfrey's lesser, though more noisy, acquaintances, the rooks, had built themselves nest after nest, during many generations of men. Judging by their noisy and excited cawings, and by the frequent disturbances and rearrangements that took place long after the little boy fancied that they were comfortably settled for the night, their lives could not have been altogether free from discord. They seemed contented, however, on the whole; nor could a *nouveau riche*, who had hired one of the manor-houses in the neighbourhood, and who thought that a rookery would look respectable, induce any of them to remain with him, though, besides providing them with ready-made nests, he had tied raw meat to his tree-tops, and scattered grain at the foot of them. The cunning birds 'ate and were filled,' but declined to roost where they had supped, and remained constant to the gnarled groves of Dallingridge. On this evening, there seemed to be an unusual commotion amongst the black-feathered colony—the parent birds whirling oftener than was their wont over the gray chimney-stacks of the old

house, followed by the young ones with their shriller voices ; and, by reason of it, Godfrey was kept awake until nearly nine o'clock, by which time Mary Parker had finished her supper, and he could see her seated at the table in the middle of the room, mending a pair of his socks, close to the tail of the great white rocking-horse. It was now that he heard, as usual, a dull thudding sound just outside the nursery-door, accompanied by the murmur of gruff voices, and the tread of hobnailed boots. This he knew proceeded from Joe Crosby and John McBean—gardener and leaf-sweeper, respectively—in the act of filling the large wood-basket ; and he knew that when the filling was accomplished, John McBean would come into the nursery, to say good night to Mary Parker, and to drink a glass out of a black bottle which she used to bring forth from the cupboard,—for this was what happened every night, although he was sometimes too sleepy to see it. With John McBean (an honest red-haired Scotchman, imported from Mr St. Clair's northern estates—for he had property in Scotland as well as in England), there came into the nursery a mingled odour of mould, clay-pipe, and corduroy, which would even linger there some time after his departure ; but to Godfrey, who was too young as yet to be fastidious, this was only the well-known aroma of honest John McBean, and he liked it.

After sitting down for a while at the table until he had finished what Godfrey innocently looked upon as water—and, indeed, it was of the same colour—John used tenderly to embrace Mary Parker, with whom he had 'kept company' for many years, and take himself off ; nor was there anything singular, to Godfrey, in this proceeding : he was at an age when

what is, seems to be identical with *what ought to be*, and to him the advent of John McBean was always a pleasurable circumstance.

On this particular evening, when he felt restless and low-spirited, he was more than usually gratified at perceiving the presence of his old friends—for to him these simple people were friends indeed; and had any one asked him at this period of his life who were the two persons he loved best in the world, he would almost certainly have answered, ‘Mary Parker and John McBean.’

He now called out to the former of these two, and asked her to ‘make him go to sleep,’—which meant that she was to lean over him, patting him on the shoulder, and whispering and crooning soft things until he was too sleepy to hear them. Mary Parker, it is true, was only a plain red-faced countrywoman, with rather a thickset figure; but to Godfrey she was the representative of warmth, womanhood, maternity, and consolation. Her form seemed to his head to be ‘soft all over,’ with no hard points or angles; and though her dress was generally only of rusty-black merino, at any rate he was never chided for spoiling it, when, as now, he laid his tawny head upon her bosom, and endeavoured to compose himself to sleep.

‘You are so kind,’ he said to her timidly, ‘that sometimes I think you ought to have been really a mamma. Had you ever a little boy of your own?’

But instead of answering him, Mary only drew him closer to her heart, and Godfrey saw that she was in tears.

Seeing a ‘grown-up person’ cry, somehow inspired him with a very uncomfortable sensation, which par-

took partly of awe, partly of surprise, and partly of a nervous inclination to laugh, which soon had the effect of banishing his own sadness.

‘Perhaps,’ he thought, ‘she has got a headache or a toothache;’ or, could it be, he asked himself, that, though she was so much older than he was, she had been naughty, and that this had made her shed tears? He had always been taught that people who did wrong were invariably unhappy. He felt himself in the presence of a mystery—something he could not quite understand; and as he was wondering about it he fell asleep.

Whilst little Godfrey was snugly ensconced behind the cane walls of his crib, the following conversation was taking place downstairs in the drawing-room. Mr. St. Clair began it by remarking anxiously,—

‘I am really alarmed at the extreme sensibility of that child, since I cannot but foresee that a nature, thus prone to receive impressions, may be in danger of garnering up tares as well as wheat.’

‘It was a most extraordinary circumstance that he should sympathise with a *criminal*,’ said Mrs. St. Clair, with a shudder. ‘I declare to me it seemed quite ominous!’

‘Now you know, my dear,’ returned her husband reproachfully, ‘that by saying this you are assuming the fallacy of my favourite theory; a theory based, I am convinced, upon principles both of Wisdom and Humanity.’

‘You mean your theory of counteracting natural and inherited tendencies by a system of education, arranged specially for each individual case?’ inquired Mrs. St. Clair, pandering rashly to the old man’s love of recapitulating his opinions.

‘I do,’ he answered; ‘and with Godfrey the system I intend pursuing is this: *Primo*—towards ourselves as his parents, it is important that we should inculcate a sense of respectful submission; he must never, whatever may be the circumstances, venture to *think* even, of questioning our decision; but to arrive at this end it is not my intention to make use of harshness. I would rather that he should feel the calm force of an indomitable will, crushing and pushing him, as it were, towards the accomplishment of our design.’ . . .

‘But is it not also to be conjectured that he himself may develop an indomitable will?’ interrupted Mrs. St. Clair; ‘joined, perhaps, to fiery and untamable passions? It would be only natural.’

‘Maybe,’ replied her husband. ‘And yet what avail culture, refinement, and the teachings of morality, if they may not successfully combat and triumph over any such evil tendencies? You speak of these tendencies as “natural:” are they not, perhaps, entirely artificial? The result, rather, of the unnatural state of our own society? Let us fight the world, then, with its own weapons, bringing Art to bear upon Art, and scouting Nature where, at the outset, Nature has been the least invoked and consulted.’

‘As you say, dear, of course.’ (Like Frankenstein, Mrs. St. Clair felt that she had called up a superior force.) ‘And yet the whole thing is only an experiment.’

‘A successful one, hitherto,’ answered her husband, with satisfaction. ‘I think, Eliza, you will at any rate admit this. I have looked at that child as though through a microscope; I have studied his every movement, and analysed the impulse that prompted each thought, word, and action; and,

honestly, I can find no cause either for complaint or disappointment; and I say this from no sentimental feeling, such as so often obscures the better judgment of a person of ripe years, where children, the types of innocence, are concerned: I say calmly and dispassionately, after much observation, and with some surprise, that I can detect no vice in him whatsoever.'

'Could one be really vicious, do you think, at seven years old?' inquired Mrs. St. Clair. 'Would not the bad qualities develop later?'

'I believe we should even now perceive them,' replied her husband. 'My unfortunate brother Francis had, even at that early age, developed in some measure almost all those evil tendencies which have since lured him on to destruction, like *ignes fatui*; for, at ten years of age, besides refusing to pray, he was already opposed to capital punishment, and advocated republican principles of government. What is he now? Alas! we know only too well. An infidel, a radical, and a homœopathist! A judgment is falling upon him, however; he is becoming blind.'

'One has always heard,' said Mrs. St. Clair, with a pretty little shudder, 'that he was a very objectionable person. Oddly enough, though he is living so near us, I have only seen him once in the distance; he was sitting upon the beach at Southerbourne, eating shrimps. He is decidedly good-looking.'

'That it was my misguided brother I have not the slightest doubt, Eliza, since you tell me what was his occupation. Eating shrimps upon a public beach at a fashionable watering-place! Yes! . . . It was always his delight to fly in the face of society, and outrage all the most sacred of its established laws. His is a very terrible example. When one considers the re-

sponsibilities of parents, one wonders how any one can voluntarily accept so important a trust.'

'Yes, indeed, dear,' cut in Mrs. St. Clair. 'And yet surely nobody need marry unless they like?'

'Except with some special object in view, it is indeed marvellous that they should,' replied her husband. 'You know, Eliza, why I married you?'

'I do, dear,' said Mrs. St. Clair, quite placidly: 'in order that you might have a child who would cut out your brother and his children, if he ever had any; for his little girl was not then born—the brother who was an infidel, a radical, and a homœopathist at seven.'

'Not at *seven*, dear,' interposed her husband. 'Above all things let us endeavour to be *truthful*. 'Twould be fatal to Godfrey's eventual regeneration were he to hear his mother making so serious a misstatement. I was alluding just now to the *present* tendencies of my miserable brother.'

'And their bearing upon the present case, dear,' said Mrs. St. Clair, 'if one is to be really correct.'

'With Godfrey under our eyes, then,' continued the old man, 'I need not remind you of the object that we have in view, and you know the jealous interest with which I shall watch the progress of his moral and mental culture.'

'Yes; but now, with regard to his *real* education, do you consider that Mary Parker is intelligent enough to be his constant companion? His mind is forward for his age; he can really read and write very nicely.'

'The example of Mary Parker,' began Mr. St. Clair, again deviating from the subject, 'will show you how much may be done by constant precept joined to the wholesome occupation of correcting another. When Mary committed her youthful indiscretion there seemed

every danger that her moral character would degenerate; for grief, though it may ennoble and purify a superior intellect, acts frequently, with persons of a less robust mind, in a contrary direction; and you may remember that, after the death of her baby, Mary showed a decided inclination for the absorption of stimulants—the curse of so many of her class.’

‘Of this she is quite cured, dear—at any rate for the present,’ said Mrs. St. Clair. ‘And John McBean, too, is much improved. Really,’ she added, with a little laugh, ‘our house will end by becoming a kind of reformatory.’

‘And this will show you,’ continued her husband, prosing on, ‘the advantages of example and moral training. You know my ideas upon religion. . . . You know the importance I attach to established forms. It is true that I would employ religion merely for tonic and drastic purposes; but, then, I am one of the privileged few who can separate and reflect upon cause and effect. The *ignorant have need of Christianity*; above all, it is of value to them, spiritually, that they should contemplate, in their mental twilight, the conception of eternal punishment; and, should you for one moment doubt the salutary effect of a persistent moral training upon a human being, I must beg you to turn your attention to the vegetable kingdom, where you will observe many plants of the most noxious and poisonous nature rendered harmless, nay, even edible, by judicious pruning and delving, combined with removal to a fresh soil, which is often artificially procured. There are several varieties of the potato-tribe, for instance.’ . . .

But here Mrs. St. Clair, becoming impatient, interrupted suddenly,—

‘Don’t you think, dear, that, as it will be some time before Godfrey will go to school, it would be a good thing to have a tutor for him—some one who would read with him and teach him languages?’

‘Had you been more patient, Eliza,’ said Mr. St. Clair, ‘I should have told you that this notion had already occurred to me. I was, in fact, actually leading up to it.’

‘Let me see. Who is there?’ cut in his wife. ‘Mr. Pettigrew, the new curate, wouldn’t do, of course, though my friends at Bath, who recommended him, said that he was very clever and estimable; but we couldn’t have him without offending his Rector, Mr. Hornblower, who, as he takes pupils, will, of course, think himself the most fitted.’ . . .

‘Hornblower is an old fool!’ interrupted Mr. St. Clair, with vivacity. He was always glad, in the presence of his wife, to call attention to the Rector’s intellectual shortcomings; for Mr. Hornblower, though barely his own age, was already beginning to show signs of mental degeneracy. ‘But he is a good creature; and, though Godfrey would probably learn but little, that little would be of the right sort, for Hornblower is a sound Churchman. Of Pettigrew I know nothing.’

‘He is a very clever person, I am told,’ said Mrs. St. Clair; ‘but beyond this I, too, know nothing. Indeed, I don’t know why I mentioned his name; for I felt sure you would be afraid of offending Mr. Hornblower.’

‘Of offending Mr. Hornblower?’ repeated the old gentleman, looking at his wife with an expression of incredulity. ‘I afraid of offending that old donkey? Really, Eliza, I am ignorant wherein I have so far

incurred your contempt as that you should suspect me of such an absurdity! Why, he is not a man one can offend; and even if one *could* . . . I own I cannot imagine myself in so unusual a state of mind as that I should be afraid of offending old Hornblower!’

‘Well, at any rate, dear, *I* am afraid of offending him. *He* might be too stupid to understand a slight, but I believe his family would make themselves very unpleasant. It is true that Mrs. Hornblower is bedridden, and that one never sees her; but there is Mary Anne, who will never marry now, for she must be considerably over forty. I am told that she once tried very hard, years ago, to marry *you*, and that she has been very spiteful about it ever since, saying she only cared for your money, and that now she is wiser, she would not take you at a gift. But, still, I dare say her father will be the best person for Godfrey.’

‘Mary Anne Hornblower said that, did she?’ exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, with a sudden fire in his eye. ‘Aha! that was what she said!’ and he appeared as though he was controlling himself with an effort.

‘She is a spiteful creature,’ returned his wife; ‘but her father, as you say, is a good-natured old idiot, and will do very well, I am sure, to teach Godfrey.’

‘And why, Eliza,’ cried the old man, turning the tables suddenly, ‘am I to submit to seeing the boy instructed by this old donkey? Am I to sacrifice Godfrey’s future simply because you are afraid of offending a bedridden old woman and a hideous old maid? So Mary Anne Hornblower said, did she, that she would not now take me at a gift!’ . . .

‘I would certainly far rather have her for my friend than my foe,’ remarked Mrs. St. Clair, whose long blue eyes wore an expression of veiled triumph. ‘By-the-

by, did I dream it, or did you tell me, that Mr. Pettigrew had once been chaplain to a gaol ?’

‘I did not tell you it,’ answered her husband. ‘Has he ? So much the better if he has ; but I know nothing about him.’

‘Well, then, I shall consider it a settled thing that Mr. Hornblower reads with Godfrey ; not quite yet, of course, but a little later ? Is not this your wish, dear ?’

‘*My wish !*’ exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, with irritation. ‘*My wish !* Not the very least in the world ! Really, Eliza, there are moments when you are particularly dense ! It is the last thing that I should wish, now or ever ; particularly when close at hand there seems to be another man exactly fitted for the purpose.’

‘And who may that be ?’ inquired his wife, innocently.

‘Why, Pettigrew, of course. A highly-cultivated man ; a young man ; a man accustomed to control and counteract all kinds of moral and mental obliquities in this prison where he has been chaplain ; a man most strongly recommended by your friends at Bath.’

‘Oh, I had forgotten him ; and besides, now I think of it, I don’t believe he would undertake it. I believe nothing would induce him to come.’

‘Why not ? For what reason should he refuse if we make it well worth his while ? At any rate we can but ask him.’

Mrs. St. Clair did not say anything more ; but her previous words must have had some influence with her husband, for, six weeks after this time, the Rev. Felix Pettigrew was engaged, in the intervals of his professional duties, to read with little Godfrey, and to instruct him in the first rudiments of his classics.

CHAPTER II.

BUT, perhaps, before continuing, it will be as well to go back some years, and to look into the earlier history of Mr. Erskine St. Clair of Dallingridge (the pedantic old gentleman with the pretty wife and the little boy), and his only surviving brother, Francis. That they came of an old and illustrious family, all those who may have studied the annals of 'the lordly line of high St. Clair' will already have divined, for from this noble Scotch stock the St. Clairs of Dallingridge were lineally descended. They had had a French cross, a Spanish cross, and even an Irish one; whilst Dallingridge Park had come to them at the time of the Commonwealth through an English heiress, who had married a younger son of the Scotch house; but they were St. Clairs for all that, and were very proud of their old name.

Erskine and Francis were only half-brothers, and by reason of the disparity in their ages they might perfectly have been, instead, father and son; for the former was the elder by some twenty-eight years, so that he was now at least sixty-five years old, whilst his half-brother was not yet thirty-seven. In appearance and in disposition they were altogether as dissimilar as in their ages; and as they had developed different tastes and opinions, their sympathies, never very congenial, had been drifted still further asunder by time and circumstance.

Erskine St. Clair, the elder brother, was a fair, slenderly-built man, bearing no trace in his physiognomy of the Moorish eyes and strongly-marked brows

which were supposed to have been introduced into the family by a Spanish great-grandmother, and which Francis had decidedly inherited. His figure was 'dapper' rather than athletic or symmetrical, and he affected an antiquated style of dress, which, whilst it endowed him with a certain amount of seeming originality and distinction, made him appear to belong to quite another historical epoch—an artificial epoch of shirt-frill and shoe-buckle, of formal carriage and stilted address, with which his younger brother, who had identified himself with modern progress and reform, could feel no sympathy whatsoever.

Had these two men not happened, unfortunately, to have been brothers, they might, perhaps, have mutually restrained each other's failings and exaggerations, remaining at the same time upon tolerably friendly terms; but, forced as they were by the ties of blood and vicinity to rub perpetually against each other, the friction had gradually established a raw, and at the time of which I am now writing they had become the bitterest of foes. Several causes, besides the difference in their ages and opinions, had worked together to produce this estrangement. For instance, when, some years ago, Erskine St. Clair had contemplated representing the neighbouring borough of Southerbourne in the Tory interest, it had been mortifying to his sense of 'the fitness of things' to be playfully informed by his younger brother that he intended opposing him on the side of the Liberals; and indeed, his address, issued from the neighbouring farm of Little Stillingfleet, where he had taken up his abode, was so fine a specimen of political eloquence that, though he could hardly have hoped for

anything save the defeat he experienced, it stamped him in the public mind as a young man of genius and promise, who might one day achieve greatness, although his opinions were so strangely at variance with those then in vogue with English country squires.

Then, again, the very fact that Francis should have lived at Little Stillingfleet at all, was in itself a source of annoyance and complaint to Mr. St. Clair of Dallingridge. When his father, the old Squire, had married for the second time (late in life, and when there seemed to be no reason whatever for his so doing), the act had struck Erskine as being foolish and aggravating in the extreme; but when, in addition to this, he presumed so far as to become the father of Francis, and, moreover, to desire to saddle the estate with him as well as with his second wife, this sense of his folly and of his aggravating conduct took the form of ill-judged words, and still more intemperate letters.

Erskine St. Clair had obstinately refused to sign any agreement for providing for this second family; and to punish him, as was supposed, for his insubordination, the father, at his death, had willed away, to his second son, all the unentailed property of which he had lately become possessed, including the snug farm of Little Stillingfleet, originally a part of the neighbouring estate of Poynings Abbey, and which was only separated from Great Stillingfleet (the last farm on that side of the Dallingridge property) by a shallow hazel-copse, and a privet-hedge with a rickety gate.

Looking over this gate, the long, low, whitewashed farmhouse could be distinctly seen, with its three pointed gables, covered in summer with many-coloured climbing roses, and only showing its dark oaken cross-beams and

rafters in the naked winter season. Round about it were clustered its trim straw-stacks and hay-ricks, its byres and its barns, looking like so many chessmen set up in the midst of the rich green pasture-lands, which stretched on northwards until they joined the broad acres of Sir Peckham Hickathrift, of Poynings Abbey. This, then, was the second reason (apart from his first offence of being born at all) which had alienated the friendship of Erskine St. Clair from his only brother. But the 'last straw' to a whole camel-load of ill-feeling was added a few years later, when, scorning the voice of popular opinion, Francis St. Clair actually ran away with, and married, a beautiful gipsy-girl, with whom he disappeared for some years from the eyes of civilised man, leading, so rumour insisted, a wild nomad life in Eastern lands, and becoming, so far as society was concerned, to all intents and purposes a dead man. That he was *not* one, however, was proved by the fact that he still continued from time to time to draw his allowance in due form from the county bank; and at last, after some seven or eight years of wandering, his only female retainer—an honest countrywoman, who took care of the house of Little Stillingfleet—received an intimation of his projected return; whereat she and all the farmhouse gossips in the neighbourhood had become intensely excited. It was confidently expected that Francis St. Clair would make his appearance in what was popularly called 'a caravan'—that is to say, a covered gipsy-cart, furnished on the outside with rough wicker-work baskets, green brooms, door-mats, and kettle-holders; and on the *inside* with a black-browed and slatternly *smala*, consisting of bold-looking women and shock-

headed babies, whose squalling was usually accompanied by the yelping of sundry ill-favoured mongrel curs.

But in whatever form of conveyance they might present themselves, the advent of these interesting Bohemians was looked forward to with no small degree of curiosity, which increased considerably as the day approached which had been fixed upon by 'Mr. Frank' for his return. Being in total ignorance as to the point of the compass whence this eccentric family would journey, it seemed for some time doubtful which would be the most favourable spot to select as a point of observation; but it was at last suggested by one shrewder than his neighbours, that as there was but one lodge-gate leading into the estate of Little Stillingfleet, this entrance would be the place at which they had better post themselves; and here it was, consequently, that a little knot of them were gathered together on the afternoon of the expected arrival.

After they had waited some hours, during which time every approaching vehicle had been keenly scrutinised, a dark speck appeared upon the far white expanse of turnpike-road, seeming no bigger at first than the 'little cloud' seen by the servant of the prophet, and every eye was immediately strained in the direction whence it was seen advancing. On, on it came, growing every instant larger and more distinct, accompanied by a cloud of dust, which blew all to one side of the road, and vanished over the hedge like smoke.

But, O disappointment! it turned out to be nothing more nor less than the four-o'clock coach from London, which had somehow managed to arrive a little before

its time; and, upon this prosaic discovery, the baffled gossips withdrew their gaze from the despised thing, and began to scan the distant line of white turnpike-road in an opposite direction. What, however, was their surprise when, at this very lodge-gate of Little Stillingfleet, the great swinging, lumbering, dust-covered London coach, came suddenly to a standstill, and Francis St. Clair, 'clothed and in his right mind,' to all appearance—that is to say, dressed very much like anybody else—and looking as handsome as ever, sprang lightly down from his seat by the side of the driver.

'How d'ye do, Stubberfield? How d'ye do, Nelus?' said he, nodding, as he recognised some of his old friends amongst the assembled rustics; and, without more ado, he walked carelessly round to the left-hand door of the coach, where a female passenger handed him, out of the window, a small bundle of plaids, and another still smaller bundle, which squeaked a little, as it was evidently somewhat ruthlessly awakened, and opened upon the beholders a pair of very large black eyes. This second bundle was Francis St. Clair's only child—a daughter—the sole issue of his marriage—whose mother had died, but a few months ago, in giving her birth, and who might one day have become the possessor of Dallingridge Park, had not Erskine St. Clair, anxious that the old place should not pass to what he considered so degenerate a race, married almost immediately after his younger brother. He had united himself to a very pretty young lady of eighteen, whose acquaintance he had made at a fancy-fair at Bath; and the arrival of Godfrey upon the scene, a year or two afterwards, had effectually done away with the future

pretensions of any possible gipsy-cousins; for, notwithstanding that Francis had married before Erskine, his little girl was not born until Godfrey was about five or six years old.

Taking possession, then, of these two bundles, Francis St. Clair walked briskly down the hilly road to the white farmhouse with the pointed gables; and here it was that he had resided, off and on, ever since—leading his own life, dreaming his own dreams, and associating no more than he could help with his neighbours, who were most of them somewhat curious to know what the object of his life and of his dreaming really was. Several strange stories naturally got afloat, which were afterwards either toned down or exaggerated, according to the wisdom or credulity of the first hearers. It was suspected that some mysterious scheme for the eventual regeneration and reorganization of Europe and the East was what occupied chiefly his thoughts and his energies; for, during his eight years of married life, he had travelled much in Eastern countries, and had come back impregnated, like so many other Englishmen before him, with the subtle fascinations of Oriental life. It was known that, besides having been created a Turkish Bey, he had great influence with the Sublime Porte; he had been sent on a private mission to the *Vladika*, or Prince-Bishop of Montenegro, and he had since foregathered with many high-poised functionaries and politicians, as well as with revolutionary leaders and celebrities—saviours and reformers, perhaps, in the eyes of their disciples—who flash from time to time across the political horizon, leaving behind them a trail luminous, it may be, but often

sadly bespattered with gore. Nay, some of these had even penetrated to the sylvan shades of Little Stillingfleet; and it was by no means an unusual occurrence for the London coach to set down at the lodge-gate fierce-eyed Circassian warriors, whose long moustaches, and picturesque leggings, delighted and astonished the honest chawbacons; whilst Polish princes, Italian Carbonari, and 'rightful heirs,' dispossessed of their inheritance, became, as it were, mere 'drugs in the market,' being sent down by the dozen, whenever (as Mr. St. Clair's 'London correspondent' informed him) they were considered 'dangerous,' and required the tranquillity and salubrity of the country.

But Godfrey knew nothing of these strange kinsfolk; their very existence had been carefully concealed from him, although they were living so near that, by going up into the high meadows where the mushrooms grew, and looking over the rickety five-barred gate in the privet-hedge, he might almost have dropped a pebble straight down upon the snug homesteads of Little Stillingfleet, which lay smiling in the hollow beneath. And indeed not only Godfrey's father and mother, but most of their very orthodox and strait-laced neighbours, avoided the place as though it had been accursed ground, since by many of them one of the current rumours was conscientiously believed,—namely, that Mr. Francis St. Clair and his daughter went about wearing very little in the way of clothes, and worshipped the devil.

And now, when I have said a few words respecting the Rev. Samuel Hornblower and his new curate, the Rev. Felix Pettigrew, I shall pass on to the continuation of my narrative; but, as these two persons are,

in some measure, involved in it, I feel bound, before proceeding, to describe them superficially.

Taken individually, they might be regarded as typical clergymen of opposite opinions, which opinions nowadays would probably, in the case of the Rector, have taken an aggressively 'Evangelical' turn; whilst his curate might, perhaps, have given more decided expression to those Ritualistic leanings which were lurking secretly in his bosom. The times were young, however, for those changes of form and dogma which have come upon us lately with gigantic strides; and, as neither Mr. Hornblower nor Mr. Pettigrew had ever arranged their ideas in any definite form, they did not consider it necessary to assume one towards the other that attitude of animosity and menace so common now between brethren of the same cloth.

Samuel Hornblower, tall, burly, and upright for his years, was a heavily-built man, who rode at least sixteen stone, and loved his midday meal and his bottle of old port at dinner. His mind was hardly in the same robust condition as his body, although this fact may have been nowise owing to his sixty-seven years; for Erskine St. Clair was wont to say that he had been a young fool before he was an old one, and that he had never had two ideas in his head since he was an infant in arms. He was a married man; but as his wife was a person of inferior birth and education, she had very seldom been permitted to appear upon the scene, and having now become a helpless invalid, she had been put away somewhere in a back-room, and nobody ever thought about her at all.

It was Mary Anne Hornblower—the only daughter of this marriage—a spinster of some forty years of

age—who took the management of her father's house, and was in reality the only motive-power in the establishment. She it was who entertained his guests when they came to call at the Rectory, receiving them in the prim drawing-room, where everything was either placed carefully upon a woollen mat or under a glass case. It was in this room that she would be discovered upon their entrance, engaged in drawing or stencilling, in modelling wax so as to look like flowers, or leather so as to resemble carved wood; for she was positively bristling with minor modern accomplishments; whilst in the background lurked a harp of formidable dimensions, shrouded in a spectral covering of brown holland.

And yet it could not be said that, in order to pursue the artistic relaxations of life, she neglected any of its more serious duties. In an upper chamber she used secretly to manufacture under-garments for the poor children of the village, which, when completed, would gladden the heart of many an indigent cottager. The red-worsted shawls worn by nearly all the old women in the neighbourhood were knitted by her, and she reigned supreme at such benevolent institutions as soup kitchens, boot clubs, and school feasts; for her father, though a good-natured man on the whole, seldom troubled himself about the poor, and left their interests entirely in Mary Anne's hands, who, as he used to say, was capable of becoming anything in the parish, 'from a midwife upwards.'

He himself was generally to be seen riding about the country on a fat cob for his own amusement, or basking in his garden whenever the weather was

warm, reading the sporting newspapers. His dislike to parochial visiting was only confined to visiting the poor; so that he was constantly in the habit of paying his respects to the owners of Dallingridge Park and Poynings Abbey, presenting himself usually at or about the luncheon-hour, for one of his chief delights was to feed in the society of persons who considered themselves his betters.

On these occasions he was generally full of anecdotes, or rather, he was full of the only two anecdotes he ever related, and which he had related so often that the whole neighbourhood knew them perfectly well by heart, and had long ceased to consider them in the light of anecdotes at all, paying no more attention to them than is paid to the distant burring of a barrel-organ at a London dinner-party, to which everybody tries not to listen.

Knowing that the establishment was conducted upon very eccentric and unorthodox principles, that the house was generally filled with 'Jews, Turks, and Infidels,' and divining that the fare was primitive, and the wine scarce (for Mr. Francis St. Clair joined to his other foibles that of being a water-drinker), Mr. Hornblower had never turned the nose of his trusty cob in the direction of the flesh-pots of Little Stillingfleet, though its owner had more than once remarked innocently to his little daughter, 'I almost wonder why old Hornblower never comes down our way now: he used to be very kind to me when I was a boy;' and this may have been true, but then that was before Francis St. Clair had put himself outside the pale of good society and the Church.

Of Mr. Pettigrew it will not be necessary to say

much, as he will figure oftener than the Rector in these pages, and will consequently have opportunities for developing and revealing himself. His personal appearance formed a decided contrast to that of Mr. Hornblower. He was a pale and delicate-looking young man of nearly thirty, with refined features; the faults of his countenance consisted chiefly in a somewhat contracted line of brow, a general absence of shade, and the poorness and weakness of the eyes, which seldom looked any one straight in the face. Besides being almost an *eyeless* man, he was also, to all intents and purposes, *lipless*; that is to say, there was not the slightest difference in colour or texture between the faint lines which indicated the position of his mouth, and the waxen pallor of the surrounding space. This pallor, which might have made him appear interesting to those who regarded it as the possible result of the midnight vigil, or of a warfare constantly waged against 'the world, the flesh, and the devil,' did not apparently proceed from these causes. His health, judging by his appetite, was excellent; and his parochial activity showed that he must have been possessed of a constitution capable of enduring perpetual fatigue.

He smiled seldom; and when he did so, his smile was of a forced and mechanical kind, as though in obedience to the pulling of some invisible wire, causing a momentary relaxation of the compressed lips, and displaying a white and substantial row of grinders, so evenly planted as to suggest, at first, a suspicion of *Art* rather than Nature, and giving to the lower portion of his countenance a somewhat carnivorous expression. So faded and insignificant, indeed, was this

countenance, that it seemed as though Nature, after she had limned and coloured it, had taken up a sponge, and endeavoured, as far as was possible, to dab out her handiwork, leaving only the sharp, clear-cut nose in profile, and in full face, these same white teeth, and his gold spectacles, so persistently worn that they appeared almost to have become a feature. When alluding to his own stature, Mr. Pettigrew always described himself as being 'of the middle height;' but this would, of course, depend upon the number of feet assigned to the two extremes. He was possessed of a harsh, grating voice, which sounded peculiarly discordant in the sensitive ears of the little boy, who experienced in his tutor's presence a sense of discomfort and constraint, which he was unable, at this period of his life, satisfactorily to explain. With all Godfrey's craving after knowledge, he would have preferred a thousand times the society of Mary Parker, whose conversation, although homely and ungrammatical, was interspersed with quaint saws and curious county folk-lore, delightful to his young mind, and in which there lurked, often, the first germ of some grand truth. However, it was only from ten o'clock until midday that Godfrey was taught by his uncongenial mentor, unless it pleased him, as it sometimes did, to make, instead, an assignation for the afternoon, when the boy would call for him at his lodgings in the village, and accompany him on his parochial rounds, drinking in, the while, the wisdom that fell from his lips.

But this continual intercourse had not the effect of arousing any attachment in the boy.

'He's like a stuffed man,' he explained to Mary

Parker, as a reason for his indifference to his tutor. 'And he seems wound up with a key like my coach and horses.'

And, indeed, the harsh grating voice of the curate was not unlike the whirring sound made by a mechanical toy when it has nearly run its appointed course, and is in want of re-winding.

After Godfrey had studied for a year and a half under Mr. Pettigrew he had made, however, very great progress, and he was even more advanced than some of the bigger boys who were reading under Mr. Hornblower at the Rectory; for besides the classical education which he imbibed from the curate, his father, having lived a great deal abroad, had been able to instruct him in French and Italian, and he could now read and speak both these languages with a certain degree of facility. Nevertheless, it was a sorrow to him that he could not feel more affection for his instructor, or rather, his *instructors*, for the cold and formal manner adopted towards him by Mr. St. Clair, seemed as uncongenial as the more pardonable severity of his tutor; and, during these early years, there was some danger of his becoming rather too sad and contemplative, had it not been for an unexpected happiness which came ere long to brighten and cheer his melancholy child-life.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Godfrey was about twelve or thirteen years of age, and well primed by his pastors and masters with all manner of goodly knowledge, there came upon him an inexpressible longing after some living object where-

upon he might lavish the pent-up affection of his strangely desolate youth; for although his exemplary parents seemed to be for ever anxious about his physical comfort and moral well-being, he had never received at their hands any of those foolish fondnesses which, even if they are not always appreciated by the children upon whom they are bestowed, are missed and hungered after by those to whom they have been denied. The fault, if there was one, did not certainly lie with the boy; for his father, Godfrey had always entertained the deepest reverence; whilst his mother, who seemed to his youthful eyes beautiful as an angel, he could have adored, as the higher spirits are adored by the faithful, had she ever deigned to encourage by word or deed the outpouring of his ingenuous heart.

Mrs. St. Clair, however, was the last person in the world to encourage effusiveness of any kind, particularly in a child.

There are some women, gentle and amiable, it may be, in themselves, in whom the maternal instinct does not exist; and as Nature has evidently left it out of their compositions, it would be as unjust to blame them for it as for any other omission she may have made. As a rule, mothers may be classified under three headings, each of which may be again split and subdivided.

First, there is the foolishly-fond mother, who, besides adoring and spoiling her own children, is in love, indiscriminately, with all the little ones in the world, and becomes, by reason of this unreasoning fondness, a universal and inveterate baby-kisser, and the storyteller and sweetmeat-purveyor of whole families of youngsters.

Then there is the mother whose peculiar form of selfishness prompts her to love and deal gently with her own offspring, to the ferocious exclusion of the offspring of other people, who straightway become to her only as so many 'brats,' 'imps,' and 'torments,' filling her with repulsion and disgust should they happen to be malformed or ill-favoured, and exciting her jealous indignation if they appear to others to be either more beautiful or more intelligent than her own.

Lastly, there is the mother who seems to have become one by some strange accident or mistake; who gazes with surprise and aversion upon all babies, especially upon her own; who would be afraid to touch one of them; and who does not like being left with one alone in a room—mistrusting it as something weird and elfin, and never feeling quite sure, even when it is asleep, of what it may take it into its head to do next. Fearing to exasperate it, she abstains from displaying any open sign of animosity; and this pent-up sense of constraint, widening and broadening with the years, develops gradually into a feeling of positive aversion: for Nature, perverted, deals always in exaggerations, nor will Time often vouchsafe to supply what she has carelessly forgotten at the outset.

It was to this last type of maternity that, judging by appearances, Mrs. St. Clair of Dallingridge seemed unconsciously to belong. She had evidently a rooted distaste for children, and everything that appertained to them. It is true that she frequently addressed Godfrey as 'dear,' and that she even permitted him to embrace her, both before breakfast and at his bedtime; but any one looking on upon these occasions would have realised at once that she was merely submitting, from a stern sense of duty, to what was to her a

superfluous and disagreeable form. She would turn aside her well-cut profile in such a way as only to present a portion of her small ear to the boy, her lips growing compressed the while, and her brows contracted, whilst the whole expression of her countenance seemed to say as plainly as words, 'Since it has to be done, for Heaven's sake let us get it over as soon as possible!'

Godfrey himself had noticed this, ever since he was of an age to notice anything at all, and he one day remarked innocently to Mary Parker,—

'When I kiss mamma she makes a face as if she was smelling a bad smell, and shrinks away as *I* used to when I was little, and when you used to soap my face.'

In answer to this, Mary (who was a genuine specimen of the unreasoning and indiscriminate lover of all children) only broke forth into affectionate and sympathetic words, as she always did upon the slightest provocation.

She was tying on her bonnet, and Godfrey was going to accompany her as far as the dairy, which was situated some way from the house, on a lately-acquired piece of ground, divided by the turnpike-road from the rest of the park. Before starting, however, he had occasion to replace a book in the drawing-room, and, finding his parents alone there, he ventured to make known to them the unaccountable void which seemed widening in his heart.

'Mamma,' he said timidly, for he always approached his mother with feelings of the deepest awe and admiration, 'sometimes I can't help feeling a little lonely. Might I have something to amuse me?'

‘Have you not your books, Godfrey?’ demanded his father, looking up at him from the newspaper over his spectacles.

‘Yes, papa—I know—but I meant something *alive*,’ explained the boy.

‘I fancied,’ said his mother, in a somewhat aggrieved tone, ‘that you were getting so attached to your pony.’

‘Yes, so I am, mamma. I am very fond of him; but then he lives in the stables. I mean something that I could have *always* with me, that I could nurse and pet—something bigger and more intelligent than a white mouse or a gold-fish. Tom Hickathrift had a very large black dog when he was at Mr. Hornblower’s, and then he was only twelve and a half.’

‘That dog is sure to go mad and bite,’ answered Mrs. St. Clair severely, ‘and then Tom Hickathrift will die in the most dreadful agonies.’

‘Will he?’ asked Godfrey anxiously, concerned for the welfare of his friend, the only hope of Sir Peckham Hickathrift of Poynings Abbey, who had just left the neighbourhood for Eton.

‘And if Tom Hickathrift goes mad,’ continued his mother, ‘that is no reason why *you* should too. Let me see; what animal is there, dear, that would not bite or scratch, and that would live in this climate without giving trouble, and that wouldn’t eat the white mice, or the gold-fish, or my love-birds? He doesn’t seem to care for guinea-pigs.’

‘We will consider,’ answered Mr. St. Clair gravely. ‘This will be no easy matter.’

‘To be sure, there is a hedgehog!’ Mrs. St. Clair murmured pensively.

'Oh, no! I would rather not have that, thanks!'

exclaimed the boy, 'for I'm sure just as I got to be fond of him, he would roll himself up in a ball.' And, indeed, it seemed to him as if everybody, except Mary Parker, behaved somewhat after this fashion.

'I have solved the question,' said Mr. St. Clair, in an oracular voice; and then, as Godfrey looked at him 'with wonder-waiting eyes,' he added benignantly, 'You shall have a *tortoise*, my boy. It does not bite, it possesses very little feeling or vitality; most of the year it is torpid, and you can carry it about in your pocket like a brickbat.'

But Godfrey departed from the presence of his parents without feeling very much happier at the prospect of this unemotional consoler, and his life seemed to him as desolate as ever.

Mary Parker, after she had left the dairy, took her return-way by a circuitous route, in order that they might pass through the little wood, in the centre of which, curiously enough, was situated the church. The church thus romantically placed was of extremely ancient origin, having been erected so long before the invention of coaches and carriages, that it could only be approached by a narrow footpath traversing the shady surrounding grove of oaks, alders, and hornbeams. Its interior, which had remained in precisely the same condition for several centuries, was well worth a visit; but as the good old English custom of keeping churches hermetically sealed and locked during weekdays prevailed here as elsewhere, Mary Parker and her young charge could not have entered it had they desired to do so. They passed by the porch, therefore, and took their way slowly

through a portion of the burying-ground, the boy loitering behind, from time to time, in order to add to the bunch of wild flowers which he held in his hand.

The churchyard, 'where the departed peasants mixed with clay,' seemed, at this period, to be almost exclusively the resting-place of the poor; for, save that three or four of the older monuments, gray and crumbling, bore the names and arms of some of the leading local families, it was undulated only with upheaved osier-bound mounds, for the most part without either head-stone or foot-piece. Since the days, however, of which I am writing, the neighbouring watering-place of Southbourne has become fashionable, and visitors, on the look-out for the picturesque, have discovered this quaint little Norman church, the situation of which, embedded in woods, and unapproachable by wheels, delighted their cockney imaginations, and inspired them with the desire to baptize, to marry, and, eventually, to bury their dead, in this romantic and secluded spot. In an incredibly short space of time, monument after monument has arisen, garish with paint and gilding, and looking for all the world like so many gaudy mushrooms. Here may be seen, now, every species of debased funereal decoration—cruciform, pasty-form, castellated—priggish urns, reminding the beholder of soup-tureens, and smart polished obelisks of shining red granite, which shoot up pertly, amongst many other vulgar emblems of life and immortality. A master-stonemason, with his men, has established himself in a temporary shed hard by, where he turns off prim fashionable tombstones by the dozen; and were it not that

‘The grave’s mouth laughs unto derision
Desire and dread, and dream and vision,
Delight of heaven and sorrow of hell,’

and that the dead possess

‘No place for sound within their hearing,’

the whirring of circular saws, the hammering of mallets, and the scratching and chipping of chisels, together with the singing, whistling, and jesting of these artificers, would surely disturb the silent neighbours for whom they are labouring so cheerfully. But as yet the ruthless colony of new-dead had not invaded this quiet corner, or thrust their company upon its humbler occupants, ploughing up their mouldering coffins, dispersing their garnered bones, and giving to this once rustic ‘God’s acre’ the appearance of a public tea-garden.

Here, then, at this time, remote and shut away from all the jarring discords of the world, ‘the rude forefathers of the hamlet’ slept, each in his humble osier-bound bed. They were a little company of friends, too, could they have made answer to some manner of military roll-call; and many of them lay at the feet of their earthly masters, hard by the more important tombs. ‘Tom,’ ‘Dick,’ and ‘Harry,’ boon companions in the tap-rooms of the Harrow and the Black Horse—men smock-frocked, hale and hearty, handy with hoe and pitchfork—wearers in life of the low-crowned black-beaver hats, now almost obsolete, and addressed, once, by their farm-servants as ‘Master,’ having exchanged their hats for a chin-band, and their smocks, brodered in chain-stitch and honeycomb-pattern, for a shroud, waited here patiently ‘in the blessed hope of a joyful resurrection.’ ‘Master’

Adds, 'Master' Gladwish, 'Master' Brett, and 'Master' Skinner—all great men in their day—slept here side by side, even as they had laboured in life, their resting-place unmarked by stock or stone; but Godfrey knew well where they were each one of them buried, although they had no names written over them (according to the new fashion, the initial letters are all painted in in red), and would say, pointing with his finger, 'There's Master Adds, there's Master Gladwish,' or, 'There's Master Brett that was gored by our new bull before he had chains fastened to his nose,' &c.; for to him each green mound possessed an individuality, and Death having for him no terrors, he used to run over the names quite cheerfully: in fact, this was one of his favourite walks.

'The nuts grow so much bigger here in autumn than anywhere else,' he remarked to Mary Parker, looking up at the hazel bushes on the confines of the burying-ground, which displayed as yet only their waving tassels of 'lambs' tails.' 'And look how green the grass is! I am glad those poor sheep are allowed to come in and eat it.' And indeed the grass was much greener here than in the meadows beyond.

'Yes, it do look beautiful and peaceful, to be sure,' answered Mary, with tears in her eyes. 'And I do so love to see sheep and lambs feeding in a churchyard.'

'So do I,' said Godfrey. 'But look what a funny little grave that lamb is climbing on to, just between Master Adds and Tom Brett! I never noticed it before.'

Mary was weeping now in good earnest.

'Don't, Mary, don't!' cried the boy. 'I am sure they're all very happy and comfortable here.'

'Yes, dear, I know,' she answered. 'And they will all rise up some day, and be as beautiful as

angels; and they're angels now, too. Let us sit down here and rest.'

'I can't understand how they can be here and there too,' said Godfrey, pointing to the clouds.

'Ah, but they *are*, dear, somehow,' said Mary.

'I know they are *there*,' said the child, again looking up.

'And I feel that they are *here*, too,' said Mary, looking down sadly at the little mound. 'It's all a great mystery.'

'It just fits into my back,' Godfrey remarked, establishing himself against the tiny grave. 'Poor little thing! I suppose it was a baby?'

'I suppose it was, dear,' answered Mary, still weeping. 'Just you run on home,' she added, presently, 'and I'll soon catch you up. There's the key of the gate in the wall; and in case you get there first, leave it ajar with a stone, and mind you don't cross over the road before you've looked to see that there isn't a cart coming.' And with this she gave Godfrey a key, which fitted one of the smaller entrances in the park wall.

'I'll leave these here,' he said, as he rose to depart; and he placed his nosegay of nodding fox-gloves and bluebells upon the little mound. He was glad to have the chance of running home, for, child though he was, he at once perceived that Mary Parker was about, for some reason or another, to indulge in 'a good cry,' and he was afraid that his presence embarrassed her.

'Bless you! bless you! you are a dear boy!' she exclaimed, as she embraced him suddenly. 'I really do believe you are the best boy in the world.' But he hardly heard this concluding remark, he was already

bounding off homewards, with a sensation akin to one of relief.

After leaving the churchyard, he ran on for some distance through the wood, his mind still musing upon the great mysteries of life and death; and as he switched the young leaves from the overhanging hazels, his thoughts were strangely at variance with his boyish and light-hearted action.

When he came to the stile separating the wood from the high-road, he perceived, coming from the direction of Southerbourne, which was about five miles distant, a heavy four-horse waggon, half hidden in a cloud of dust. It was so far off that he could easily have crossed over the road before it approached within a dangerous distance; but, O joy, as he looked and listened, a delightful tinkling sound broke upon his ear, which told him that it was drawn by 'bell-horses,' and he could not resist the temptation of waiting until he had seen it pass. He was fully prepared to cross over as soon as it was out of sight; but, as Fate would have it, no sooner had it arrived opposite the stile, than the carter, with many exclamations, adjurations, and crackings of his whip, understood only by his handsome, iron-gray, scarlet-tasselled team, stopped the waggon, which was filled full of new hop-poles, and began to remedy something which had gone amiss with the harness of one of the leaders. In this carter, Godfrey at once recognised an old friend—Abel Reynolds, now in the service of Sir Peckham Hickathrift, but who had been born and bred on the Dallingridge estate; and, upon glancing down at the side of the waggon near to where the drag was suspended, he read, sure enough, in white letters on a blue ground, 'Sir

Thomas Peckham Hickathrift, Baronet, M.P., Poynings Abbey,' and then followed the names of post-town and county. This fully accounted for the deep-mouthed bells; for it was the custom in this part of England, as it may be, perhaps, elsewhere, for the owners of abbey lands to decorate their teams with bells and tassels.

Abel Reynolds, a fine hale young waggoner in a smock-frock, corduroy trousers tied round the knees with string, and a black-beaver hat, the brim of which looked as though it had been gnawed by rats, had just relighted his pipe previous to starting, when, perceiving Godfrey, he greeted him respectfully, at the same time asking whether he could give him 'a ride.'

'Along o' missy there,' said he; and he pointed to some one who sat embedded amongst the hop-poles, and whom the boy had not yet remarked. He glanced up now, and saw, seated in a cleft towards the further side of the waggon, a very strange-looking little girl, holding in her arms a beautiful white cat. Godfrey never knew whether it was the remarkable countenance of this child, or an irresistible desire to pat the white cat, which made him fling to the winds Mary Parker's recent injunctions, and brave the probable displeasure of his parents, by availing himself of Abel's polite offer. Certain it is that he had climbed nimbly in at the back of the waggon before the carter had time to assist him. 'Crack!' went the brass-mounted whip; once again were exclamations and adjurations uttered by the waggoner, but with a different meaning now, for off went the powerful iron-gray horses, the merry sound of their jangling bells delighting the heart of Godfrey, who found himself sitting quite close to the little girl with the white cat. She had at first seemed surprised, and almost frightened, at his sudden appearance; but

this expression on her face soon yielded to one of calm indifference, very unusual in so young a child, and she continued to stroke and fondle her cat in dignified silence.

‘Put me down at the next lodge-gate, please,’ Godfrey had said to the carter upon climbing into the waggon. He began to wonder now what he should say to the strange little girl, and he commenced looking her over attentively, with the view of judging, if possible, from her appearance, what subjects would be likely to interest her.

But now a great surprise awaited him.

This little girl, who, with her pretty face and shoulders protruding from amongst the hop-poles, had seemed to him to resemble some beautiful fairy princess, was, now that he came to examine her, meanly and poorly clad; or rather, she could scarcely be said to be clad at all, for the flimsy skirt she wore was so short and tattered that it hardly descended to her knees. Her feet and legs were bare, and her hair, which was long and wavy, hung loose about her naked sunburnt shoulders, seemingly little kempt or cared for. In fact, everything about her dress, or rather *undress*, led him to suppose that she was merely some poor little beggar-maid, whom the good-natured Abel had conveyed out of charity upon part of her foot-sore journey, and to whom he might himself appear quite in the light of a young Cophetua,—whence, perhaps, her look of mingled terror and surprise when he had leapt into the place beside her. With this notion, he was just on the point of searching in his pockets for some small change, when the strange look of dignity in her dark eyes caused him to hesitate, and he resolved, before committing himself, to question

her a little, with the hope of finding out who and what she was.

Children are often far more shy and self-conscious than their elders; and it was, therefore, not without considerable inward emotion that Godfrey, having decided upon breaking the ice, demanded politely of his little companion whether she would give him permission to stroke her cat.

'Yes, you may stroke him,' she answered, in a very gentle and refined tone. 'He likes to be scratched just above his tail and over his eyebrows;' and she lifted the white cat on to Godfrey's knees.

'How old are you?' he inquired now, emboldened by her kind manner.

'I am eight and a half,' she answered. 'How old are you?'

'I shall be thirteen next month—my birthday is on the thirteenth.'

'Mine is on the thirteenth, too,' said the little girl, 'only of a different month. That is an odd coincidence, is it not?'

'Yes; you use very fine words for your age,' said the boy, smiling. He felt now as if they had been friends for a long time.

'I live with grown-up people, and I always read grown-up books: perhaps that's the reason. I suppose most children are very babyish?'

'I don't know many,' answered Godfrey. 'I haven't got any brothers or sisters. *You* are the only little girl I have ever seen close, except . . . except . . .' he added, after a pause, 'quite *common* children, you know.'

'*I* have no brothers or sisters either,' remarked the little girl. 'Another coincidence!'

‘Yes; I’m sure we ought to be friends. And now, do tell me, where do you live, and what is your name?’

‘My name is Sophy, and I live *there*,’ pointing to a distant belt of fir-trees, which looked black against the pink evening sky. ‘At least, that’s the rookery at Sir Peckham Hickathrift’s—the nearest place to my home that you can see from here. My home is rather too low down for you to see: it’s between there and here. And now, where do you live yourself?’

‘I’m afraid I’m very near, indeed, to my home,’ said Godfrey, sadly. ‘In fact, we are driving just outside the wall of it. I wish, I’m sure, it was further off. I shall have to get down directly.’ And he could not help heaving a sigh.

As he said this a very strange expression came over the face of his little companion. It was a look of mingled horror and astonishment.

‘You live *there*!’ she repeated, excitedly. ‘Oh, how dreadful! Then you come from the enemy’s country!’

‘Where is the “enemy’s country?”’ the boy asked, opening his eyes.

‘*There—here*—inside this very wall!’ answered little Sophy, waving her bare arms towards the boundary of Dallingridge Park. ‘We have a terrible border-feud with them. Haven’t you heard about it?’

‘About what?’ asked the boy, bewildered.

‘The feud;—I sometimes make incursions across the frontier from the other side; but I go, of course, always armed to the teeth. It’s very romantic and exciting.’

‘I should think it must be: but, oh, here we are at the lodge-gate! I’m so sorry, just as you were going to tell me about something so interesting!’

And, indeed, this strange little girl had begun to interest him already. He waited for the waggon to come to a standstill before he tore himself from her side; but, as either good or ill luck would have it, Abel Reynolds seemed to have forgotten all about his instructions, and the gray bell-horses went steadily on until they had passed the lodge-gate. Godfrey’s heart failed him; and yet he thought, at last, that he had better call out to him to stop, and he was about to begin saying good-bye to Sophy, when she interrupted him by exclaiming,—

‘He hasn’t stopped there of his own accord, so let him go on. It’s *kismet*.’

‘And what’s that?’ asked Godfrey, who had never heard the word before.

‘It’s a part of our religion,’ answered the little girl; ‘and it means that it was meant by the Fates that Abel Reynolds should go on.’

‘I’m really very glad he didn’t stop,’ said the boy, his conscience quieted by his companion’s positive manner. ‘I shall go on now as far as the Black Horse, and then run home by the high mushroom-fields above Great Stillingfleet.’

‘Do you ever miss any of your mushrooms?’ asked his companion mysteriously.

‘Not that I know of: but we never count them. Why do you ask?’

‘Never mind—I won’t say,’ answered the little girl, laughing.

‘You’re very funny, and different from other

people,' said Godfrey, smiling also. 'But I like you, and I hope I shall often see you again.'

'Yes, and so do I like *you*, though you *are* my enemy; but then that's what very often happened in ancient times. I read about it in old ballads. When there were feuds and quarrels in families, the sons and daughters nearly always fell in love. The Child of Elle and Fair Emmeline fell in love, and a lot more.'

'Did they?' asked Godfrey; and whether it was that he thought the idea possible or impossible, he felt certain that he was blushing, and he asked hurriedly, in order to turn the subject,—'At what time do you go to bed?'

'Go to bed!' repeated Sophy scornfully. 'The Mussulman never puts himself between sheets!'

'Oh, no, of course not—I forgot!' (for he had no wish to appear ignorant). 'But are you a Mussulman—or perhaps,' he added, 'I ought to say a "Mussul-woman?"'

'No, I'm not exactly,' answered the little girl vaguely. 'Father says we're in reality kind of early Christians, only what makes us different is, that we don't exactly believe in Christianity.'

'How dreadful! But who do you say your prayers to? In my geography it says a great deal about the religions of different countries,—there are Protestants (the only *true* religion, of course), Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Greek Church, Jews, Mahometans, Buddhists'

'Oh, pray don't go on!' said little Sophy impatiently. 'I've never heard of most of those long names.'

'How dreadful!' exclaimed Godfrey again. 'And pray what kinds of religions *have* you heard of?'

'I have heard people speak of Deists, Atheists, Gnostics, and Agnostics, and the followers of the Prophet,' answered the little girl. 'And father says that though we go a great deal by the Koran and the Zendavesta, we can't be exactly considered to belong to any religion at all; but on the whole he says he thinks we may best describe ourselves as Agnostics, or else as early Christians.'

'Oh, really!' answered Godfrey, somewhat mystified. 'And who do you say your prayers to? . . . I suppose to "Agnostic,"' he added, with a sudden 'happy thought.'

'Oh, no! I never say my prayers to anybody. Father says it doesn't at all matter, so long as one does right.'

'I don't believe there ever *was* such a god as "Agnostic,"' Godfrey remarked musingly, going over in his mind the names of most of the mythological deities he remembered. 'No, I'm quite sure there wasn't any such a god anywhere.'

'I can't argue with you,' said the little girl, with quiet dignity. 'Father said that I shouldn't meet many people of our religion, because we are living amongst idolaters.'

'What a shame of your father! just as if we were the savages that ate up Captain Cook!' he added indignantly, still thinking of his geography.

'Well, they were quite right to eat him,' said the little girl. 'I should have eaten him myself. Father says the pale-faces only introduce smallpox and fire-water amongst the poor savages and red Indians. How would you like people to come to your country and take

it away, and give you instead only glass beads and illnesses, and horrid things to drink ?’

‘ Captain Cook would have introduced the Bible,’ answered Godfrey, with solemnity.

‘ Yes, I dare say he would,’ rejoined Sophy warmly. ‘ Well, how would you like people to take your country, and introduce the smallpox, and the Bible, and gin, and brandy, and glass beads ?’

‘ The Bible ought not to be spoken of with those things. It’s a book, and a very, very good one.’

‘ Oh, is it ?’ said the little girl carelessly. ‘ I’ve never read it.’

‘ Never read the Bible, and never said your prayers ! O Sophy !’ and for the first time he called her by her name.

‘ Father says he wouldn’t have me read it on any account, till I’m older ; but when I’m grown up, I shall read that and several other books I mayn’t read now. I have my books given out to me to read ; but I read others as well. I can read French books,’ she added proudly.

‘ You seem to be wonderfully clever for your age, and to know a great many things, but you ought to know others as well ; . . . you ought really to read the Bible.’ . . .

He would have said more, feeling as though the mantle of the late Captain Cook had descended upon him, had not Sophy interrupted him by exclaiming,—

‘ Really, from the way you talk, one would think the Bible was the most wonderful book in the whole world !’

‘ Oh, so it is,’ responded the boy eagerly. ‘ *It really is !* Everybody says so ! *Do* read it ! Mr. Pettigrew

says that if we *don't*, we shall go to hell ! I'll lend it you.'

'How can I do what father would not like ?' asked the little girl simply.

A new light now broke in upon Godfrey ; but he did not know exactly how to put it into words. He had been much struck at first with his little companion's remarkable appearance : her large lustrous eyes, her unusually thick and curling hair, and the sunburnt hue of her complexion. He now fancied that he could account for this, as well as for her father's peculiar ideas.

'Is your father a *white* gentleman ?' he asked, having arranged his words in a manner that would not, he fancied, give offence. In some illustrious Oriental, or noble savage, he felt he could readily forgive these heterodox opinions.

'No,' answered Sophy, after taking a good look at her companion, 'my father is not *quite* white.'

'Ah, I thought not !' Everything seemed clear to him now.

'He is a kind of light-pink colour, like you,' for she had been brought up to practise an unswerving truthfulness.

'Oh !' was all Godfrey ventured to exclaim in reply, for he could not help experiencing a sense of disappointment ; and at this moment the waggon drew up in front of the Black Horse.

Here Abel Reynolds had a tankard of ale brought out to him by the barmaid, whilst his gray horses quenched their thirst at the wooden trough under the sign-post, which bore the rough portraiture of their sable relative.

Just as Godfrey was bidding his little companion

an affectionate farewell, an old and valued friend of his own came staggering out of the inn door. This was no other than John McBean, who, having a 'wee drap' in his 'ee,' was walking rather unsteadily. Upon perceiving the two children, however, he seemed to become suddenly sober, and, to the astonishment of them both, he laid hold at once of Godfrey with a herculean grasp, and lifted him by the coat collar out over the back of the waggon, as though he had been a kitten. The boy was too surprised at first to remonstrate; and before he had recovered his self-possession, John McBean had hurried him through the white gate at the back of the inn, leading to the high meadows where the mushrooms grew in the autumn. But, first of all, he had shaken his fist menacingly at the profile of the waggoner, which was dimly to be perceived through the diamond-panes of the low tap-room window, exclaiming ominously as he did so, in his broad Lowland Scotch, 'Ah, Abel Reynolds, man! It'll be an ill day's wark ye've done the day!'

CHAPTER IV.

GODFREY felt very sorry next day that he had been unable to arrange another meeting with his little friend, and he was also much provoked at the obstinate taciturnity of John McBean, who, to all his questioning, could only be induced to reply,—

'Ye'll knaw it a' in high gude time; and ye'll no say a word o' this, or ye'll have poor Mary in sair trouble;' and then proceeded, after the manner of almost everybody else, to 'roll himself up into a ball, like a hedgehog.'

He had sought the high meadows in the direction of Great Stillingfleet, and looked over the gate at the back of the Black Horse, at the place where he had last seen little Sophy's astonished face peering out from amongst the hop-poles. Two carts and a miller's waggon, filled with white sacks, were drawn up in front of the inn, but, alas, no bell-horses and no Sophy!

He listened for some time to the distant voices of the tap-room toppers, the clashing of pots and pans, and the cackling of the fowls in the stable-yard, and went away feeling somewhat depressed, little guessing that had he peeped over either the five-barred gate or through one of the clefts in the adjoining hedge, he would have beheld the object of his search playing with her white cat in the garden of the gabled farmhouse, which seemed only a stone's throw beneath the wooded slope. He took, however, an exactly contrary way, and, turning his back unwittingly upon what he was so anxiously seeking (as both man and boy have so constantly done before), he walked sadly home through the new plantations of the upper park.

Perhaps it was only, after all, the longing for some kind of congenial companionship, even that of a sister, which made him wish to see once more his strange little newly-made friend, with her bare feet and tangled elf-locks; but yet, with this longing, there came also the knowledge that she was no sister of his—that she was a stranger, wrapped in some curious and impenetrable mystery; and this was quite enough to insure that, at any rate for some little while, she would occupy his thoughts. As he entered the house, Mr. St. Clair, hearing his footsteps, called out to him from the library; and, upon obeying the summons, he

perceived his parents seated together in front of a table, and wearing, each of them, an expression such as one might suppose the judges to have assumed at a Vehmgericht of the Middle Ages.

They were not going, however, to chasten or reprove; far from it. They were bent upon performing, in their cold mechanical fashion, every jot and tittle of a parent's duty, part of which was to minister to the harmless pleasures of their son, and to afford him every legitimate method of relaxation, in order that, by so doing, an impression of their care and equity might stamp itself upon his youthful mind.

With this object, they had applied that very morning to a naturalist at Southerbourne, who at once provided them with what they required; and the presentation of the tortoise, which was contained in a basket upon the library-table, was now about to take place, not without a few appropriate words 'to the use of edifying.'

Mr. Pettigrew was sitting in a corner of the room, engaged in turning over the leaves of a book, and he thus appeared, as it were, to assist at, and give countenance to, the proceedings, without encroaching upon the parental privilege.

'Wipe your boots, Godfrey,' Mrs. St. Clair began, 'and come here.'

'Where have you been, my boy?' inquired her husband, in a tone of studied suavity; delicacy of feeling preventing him from putting forward at once this new benefit, and hurling, so to speak, the tortoise at his son's head.

'I have been towards Great Stillingfleet, papa,' answered the boy. 'I went as far as the end of the

park, and looked over the gate of the Black Horse, and then came back.'

Both parents here exchanged rapid and significant glances, whilst Mr. Pettigrew coughed rather uncomfortably.

'You said *Great Stillingfleet*, I think?' Mr. St. Clair inquired, blandly. 'I ask, because there is an extremely savage dog, I am told, at *Little Stillingfleet*;' and, not altogether displeased with the evolving of this 'savage dog' out of his inward consciousness, the old gentleman glanced up with a somewhat arch expression at his wife.

'Yes, papa; knowing *Little Stillingfleet* didn't belong to us, I have never been so far, and have only seen it in the distance.'

'That is well,' replied the father. 'But what made you go to the Black Horse? It is a low public-house. Alas, Mr. Pettigrew,' he went on, appealing to the curate, 'when will these terrible curses disappear from our midst? The Black Horse and Harrow, both of them so near to us—one, in fact, actually joining the estate—have always proved a source of the greatest temptation to our servants.'

'You might catch some complaint there,' chimed in Mrs. St. Clair, sharply, 'and then give it to the whole house. I wonder you should like to go amongst low drunken people.'

'Boys will be boys, sir,' said Mr. Pettigrew, sighing, but preserving, in other respects, a strict neutrality. He dealt largely in proverbs and wise saws, and usually addressed Mr. St. Clair as 'sir,' in a spirit of genuine, or mock, humility.

'I will not now enter into our reasons for desiring you to confine your rambles to the inside of the park,'

Mr. St. Clair continued. 'We have several, and I do not think that anything in our past behaviour towards you ought to warrant you in imagining that they are unjust ones.' At this moment Godfrey's attention was attracted towards the basket, whence issued a strange scratching sound, ending now and then in a dull thud, as if some heavy weight had fallen to the bottom. Mr. St. Clair placed his thin white hand upon one of the flaps of the basket, and continued: 'But, as you are shortly going to exchange home life for that of a school, where you will not be permitted to enjoy the same amount of luxury and liberty as you enjoy here, we feel that we are in some measure bound to minister to your pleasure and amusement whilst you remain with us, therefore I will refrain from hampering you just now with any new restrictions. It is with this view, also, and in order that you may be made aware how anxious your mother and myself are to provide you with every enjoyment of a legitimate kind, that we have purchased for you this little animal. See!' said he, with a wave of the hand, as he proceeded to open the basket, 'it is perfectly harmless and well-conducted, and we trust that you may derive some pleasure both in tending it and in observing its habits.'

At this juncture, the 'prisoner in armour,' who had been for some time vainly endeavouring to crawl up the side of the basket, achieved his object; but he almost immediately fell over on his back upon the table, where he lay with his feet beating the air, and the under portion of his shell exposed to the company. Godfrey looked at him at first without much enthusiasm, wishing with all his heart that he had been a dog, or even a guinea-pig; but at last he took him up care-

fully, and, after examining him with curiosity, slipped him into his jacket pocket, and was about to leave the apartment, to show him to Mary Parker, when his father recalled him, saying,—

‘I think, my boy, it would not be inappropriate if this afternoon you were to read, in your Natural History, some account of the curious little creature of which you have just become the possessor. I believe that you will find it classified under the head of the *Testudinatae*, or ‘Shield Reptiles.’ You might thus discover traits, which would be of interest to you, relating to its nurture, mode of living, &c.’

‘It may have lettuce and green vegetables every day, and once a-week raw meat, cut up into little pieces about the size of a pea: it will also drink milk,’ said Mrs. St. Clair, reading from a paper of directions which had been enclosed in the basket. ‘Its name is “Alexander,” and it is about sixteen years of age.’

‘*Sixteen years old!*’ exclaimed Godfrey, in astonishment, drawing from his pocket the tortoise, which looked like a large struggling blackbeetle, and gazing at it mistrustfully. ‘This thing sixteen years old! What, older than me?’

‘One of the great advantages of selecting the tortoise as a domestic pet,’ remarked Mr. St. Clair, pedantically, ‘arises from the fact that its existence is prolonged to a far greater extent than that of the generality of God’s creatures. Nay, unless some accident should by misadventure befall it, it will even live longer than a man.’

“‘For the days of our age,’” murmured Mr. Pettigrew, “‘are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their. . . .”

But here Mrs. St. Clair was attacked by a severe fit of coughing, which silenced the curate, by reminding him that her husband had already arrived at the allotted age.

“So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,” ejaculated the old gentleman piously. ‘This, Mr. Pettigrew, is my daily-recurring prayer. And now, my dear boy,’ he added, turning to Godfrey, ‘to your afternoon studies.’

After repeating to Mr. Pettigrew his Latin task, reading aloud in English, and gleaning all the information he could respecting the habits of the tortoise, Godfrey had a good hour for reflection ere he again presented himself before his parents. It was not his privilege to dine with them ; but he used to remain in the library until they had finished their dinner, after which he would generally play a game of dominoes with his father, and then retire for the night. Part of one of the passages selected by Mr. Pettigrew for his reading upon this particular afternoon lingered long afterwards in his mind, occupying his thoughts for nearly the whole of the rest of the day.

It consisted of a long-winded dissertation upon the evils resulting from an excessive love of approbation, which the author proceeded to prove was contrary to, and opposed to, the true spirit of Christianity. During this reading Godfrey had felt his conscience prick him more than once ; and he now asked himself whether the unaccountable yearning of his heart for human sympathy might not spring merely from a vain and ignoble desire to be flattered and commended—a sentiment so mean and despicable, that it was surely his duty to root it at once from his bosom, casting it from him like a poisonous weed. The passage occurred in the *Essays*

of *John Forster* (eleventh edition, p. 425), and ran as follows :—

‘The good opinion of mankind, expressed in praise, or indicated by any other signs, pleases us by a law of the same order as that which constitutes mutual affection a pleasure, or that which is the cause that we are gratified by music, or the beauties and gales of spring. The indulgence of this desire is thus authorised to a certain extent by its appointment to be a source of pleasure. But to what extent? It is notorious that this desire has, if I may so express it, an immense voracity. . . . A whole continent applauding or admiring has not satisfied some men’s avarice of what they called glory. To what extent, I repeat, may the desire be indulged? Evidently not beyond that point where it begins to introduce its evil accessories—envy, or ungenerous competition, or resentful mortification, or disdainful comparison, or self-idolatry. But I appeal to each man who has deeply reflected on himself, or observed those around him, whether this desire, under even a considerably limited degree of indulgence, be not very apt to introduce some of these accessories. . . . In wishing to prohibit an *excess* of its indulgence, he has perceived that even what had seemed to him a small degree has amounted, or powerfully tended, to that excess—except when the desire has been operating under the kindly and approved modification of seeking to engage the affection of relations or a few friends.’

‘Indeed,’ the boy had said to himself, when he arrived here, ‘this is all I want! and that they would seem more like live people themselves, and not treat me quite as if I was a machine!’

‘But now,’ continued the essayist, ‘if the most

authoritative among a good man's motives of action must be the wish to please God, it is evident that the passion which supplies another motive ought not to be allowed, in a degree that will empower the motive thus put in force, to contest in the mind the supremacy of the pious motive . . .'

'Ah,' thought Godfrey reproachfully, 'I am very likely a vain horrid boy, wanting to be spoilt and flattered, and I am discontented with papa and mamma only because they are too wise to give in to me!'

And, by way of antidote, he set to work to think upon all their care of him ever since the days when he could first remember anything at all. Next he called to mind their kindness in so promptly presenting him with the tortoise, and he ended by asking himself what thing it was that his evil heart led him to imagine that they had left undone. Perhaps he was still hankering after and coveting Tom Hickathrift's large black dog—the dog that 'would be sure to go mad and bite' (as Mrs. St. Clair had said, no doubt in a moment of keen maternal solicitude). From Tom Hickathrift's black dog his thoughts passed on unconsciously to Tom Hickathrift himself, and then to his family and their surroundings, which he began to contrast somewhat painfully with his own. Not that he would have preferred Poynings Abbey to his own home, the home of his fathers, his dear Dallingridge, which he loved with a love amounting almost to idolatry.

It is true that the fine old Norman gateway at the Abbey, the high battlemented wall with its festoons of clinging ivy, the cool fish-ponds with their octogenarian carp, and the scutcheoned banqueting-hall, once the refectory of the monks, awakened far older historical

associations than did anything at Dallingridge Park, which possessed a Tudor house, but one which seemed almost modern when compared to a building, great part of which existed long before the Conquest. But, all the same, Dallingridge was his home, the place after his own heart, and he would certainly not have changed houses with Tom for anything in the world. Nor could he conceal from himself another fact, which must, he fancied, have been patent to everybody. Taken merely as specimens of the human race, his own parents were both apparently immeasurably superior to the parents of Thomas Hickathrift, who seemed possessed of positively no personal attractions, and a very limited proportion of intelligence, notwithstanding that Sir Peckham had for some years represented the borough of Southerbourne in Parliament, having succeeded Erskine St. Clair, Godfrey's own father. Was not their personal appearance, indeed, ridiculous in the extreme? Often and often had he watched, with amusement, the arrival of Sir Peckham and his lady, who, when they dined at Dallingridge, always insisted upon entering the room arm-in-arm, the very footmen who announced them choking the while with suppressed merriment at sight of their long noses and prancing gait. Yes, it did not require, Godfrey thought, much perspicuity to perceive that his own parents were immensely superior, as human beings, to those of poor Tom; but as regarded their treatment of himself, in what degree were they, to speak truthfully, so very much ahead of Sir Peckham and his high-featured lady?

An uncomfortable memory, which he had often tried to bury away from him, here thrust itself again upon his mind, and he determined to meet and grapple

with it once for all, hoping to subdue it finally, as the possible ancestor of the Hickathrifts, the celebrated 'Tom' of the story-book, had encountered and subdued the bears and lions in the old time. This was the memory which, somehow, seemed to bring with it a sense of jealousy and bitterness.

Godfrey had gone three or four times with his friend Tom, before his departure for Eton, to luncheon at the Abbey, and on each of these occasions, though Tom had only been absent at Mr. Hornblower's since eleven o'clock that very morning, Lady Hickathrift had been discovered waiting for him at the entrance of the ancient crypt (now used as the dining-hall), actually panting and heaving with maternal solicitude, ready to throw herself, like an expectant tigress, upon her returning cub, whom she had each time pressed passionately to her bosom. Yes, this woman, as severe and irascible, to all appearance, as a colonel of dragoons, would fold Tom over and over again in her impatient arms, and cover him with such noisy maternal kisses, that they echoed down the low-vaulted crypt for several minutes afterwards.

What a contrast was this fond and expansive welcome with his own return, when his beautiful mother of the long blue eyes, of the fine clear-cut profile, of the delicate shell-like ear, would invariably turn all these three pretty things away from his admiring gaze, giving utterance either to some trite copy-book saying, or begging him in chilling accents to be sure to wipe his boots before he approached her! As if the impetuous spirit rushing headlong to meet the fulfilment of its ideal *could* pause, without a sense of deep humiliation and baffled purpose, to wipe its boots!

Such, or some such, were the thoughts of this

strangely nurtured boy, could he have put them into intelligible language, as he ascended the staircase which led to his solitary room at the top of the old house, for he now no longer inhabited the cosey nursery at the head of the stone stairs. He could not help feeling sad and disconsolate, and, turning for comfort to the unemotional tortoise, he was disappointed to perceive that it had already secluded itself for the night. He looked with some bitterness at the hard, headless, limbless lump before him, and retired to bed in no very enviable mood; whilst his last thoughts, could they have been verbally interpreted, would probably have taken the form of that portion of Scripture wherein it is written, 'What man is there of you who, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?'

CHAPTER V.

THE first time that a youth or a maiden leaves his or her home must necessarily mark an epoch in the life of both the one and the other. He or she *may* (nay, probably *will*) return to it again, but not precisely as the same boy or the same girl. He or she, in exactly the old mood and mind, will never again cross the sacred threshold of home; against this youth or this maiden the well-known doors have closed for ever!

Several circumstances contribute to this irrevocable transformation; but perhaps the chief amongst them arises from the fact that contact with the outer world, and the mingling with its various types and individualities, whilst they may ripen, develop, and restrain, im-

perceptibly rub off some portion of that fresh bloom of innocence, of enthusiasm, and of hope, which, like the soft down on the peach, or the gold-dust on the wings of the butterfly, disappears, even after the most delicate handling.

This change was about to happen to Godfrey St. Clair. He was to go to school in about a week, and his last days were passed in making his preparations, and in bidding a fond farewell to every nook and corner of his beloved Dallingridge. He felt many regrets at the idea of his departure, but he was also filled with new hopes and ambitions; and it must be confessed that, with one or two exceptions, his heart ached more at leaving the actual soil and roof-tree of his home than any of its uncongenial occupants, notwithstanding that fate had willed that these should be his parents. But there was one regret with which neither home-soil nor roof-tree had anything whatever to do, and this was the regret that he should never again have been able to catch even a distant glimpse of the strange little girl, whose acquaintance he had made amongst the hop-poles in Abel Reynolds's waggon. Perhaps, he now thought reproachfully, he had not looked enough for her. He had gazed down at the byres, and barns, and hayricks of Little Stillingfleet; and determined, during these few remaining days, to push his search to its furthest limits, he had even gone so far as to penetrate some way into the adjacent hazel-copse, braving the ferocious bandog to which his father had alluded; but he had hitherto failed to catch sight either of her or her white cat. He felt somewhat disheartened in consequence: but still the 'kismet' of Sophy's religion seemed ever to lead him in the same direction.

'I live *there*,' she had said, pointing with her little sunburnt hand to the dark fir-tree belt beyond Poynings Abbey on the crest of the hill; and she had then added that her home was too low down to be seen from the road. Hence, her home must be in a hollow, and hence the young heir of Dalling-ridge found himself continually gazing from what little Sophy, with her love of romance, had termed 'the enemy's country' at the low-lying fields and woodlands beyond its utmost boundary. Nor did the old French saying, that everything comes to those who wait, prove false upon this occasion; for, one afternoon, as he was gazing dreamily over the five-barred gate at the gabled farm-house and its out-buildings beneath him, he was aroused from his reverie by the sight of a little girl, who, at that distance, he might not possibly have recognised, had it not been for her cat, which, with its tail straight up in the air, was following her like a dog, although from where he stood it looked no bigger than one of his own white mice. She appeared to be coming towards him, in the direction of the hazel-copse; and to vault lightly over the five-barred gate, throwing to the four winds all remembrance of the savage dog, was only the affair of a moment. He had not proceeded far when, having struck into a green arcade of hazel-boughs, he heard the bare feet of his little friend coming pattering towards him, and, as she was either talking to herself or to her cat, he was quite sure, before they actually met, that he had not mistaken her identity.

The two children stood silently looking at each other for some time, unable at first to find words in which to express their delight and astonishment. At last Sophy, who seemed by far the more outspoken of

the two, kissed Godfrey affectionately on both cheeks, saying at the same time,—

‘Oh, I *am* so glad to see you again! I’ve thought of you *so* often!’

‘So have I,’ answered the boy, unable, nevertheless, to help feeling rather shy. ‘I had no idea you lived so near.’

‘Oh, I thought I told you! And I wondered why you didn’t come.’

‘You certainly did say that you lived “*there*,” but you pointed so—quite to the edge of the sky.’

‘Ah,’ said the little girl, sadly, ‘many people *do* live there, I suppose, at the edge of the sky! Where do you suppose it leads to—the happy hunting-grounds?’

‘To heaven, I should think,’ answered Godfrey, thoughtfully. ‘And, really, if it isn’t very wicked to say so, I should say I didn’t wonder if you came from somewhere near there; you don’t look like anything earthly.’

‘Don’t I? Well, to-day I fancied I looked very earthly indeed. Look, there is earth all over my frock; but I am saving up my clean one for to-morrow, as I am going to a Party.’

‘Really?’ exclaimed the boy eagerly. ‘I wish I was going too.’

‘I don’t suppose that you know Janus and Nelus, do you?’

‘No; who are they?’

‘Janus is our maid; she once took care of me when I was very young; and she cooks for us now, and does a great many other things besides. Her real name is “Jane;” but I call her “Janus,” because it sounds better.’

'You seem to like fine-sounding names.'

'Yes, so I do ; and I like long words, and things taken from other things.'

'*Quotations*, I suppose you mean. And now tell me who Nelus is.'

'Oh, he's our boy, as we call him. He does all sorts of things, too. He carries the letters, and runs messages, and helps to look after the cart-horses and cows, and my cats. His real name is Cornelius Ford.'

'Nearly all the people about here have Christian names taken from the Bible,' said Godfrey.

'Have they ? I told you I had never read the Bible,' answered Sophy carelessly. 'Well, Janus and Nelus are going to be married at last. They've "kept company" ever since Nelus first came to us, when he was only eighteen, and he's only twenty-five now. Janus is a very great deal older, but that didn't prevent her from falling in love. They have got a little girl named Delia, but we call her "Deely" for short. She's only six. Being so young makes her cry a good deal.'

'I wonder,' said Godfrey, looking down tenderly at his little companion, 'that Nelus should like to marry any one so much older than himself.'

'Father says it always happens in these parts,' answered the little girl. 'And when he gave Janus her wedding-present, he told her she was an old fool. However, they'll stay on just the same ; so it really won't make any difference to us, except that father says we can now put them both together in one of the attics over the cart-horses—they used to have the two between them—and then we shall have an extra room when people come to stay with us.'

'Ah, yes ; that will be much more convenient, for

your house doesn't seem very large. But do you have a great many people staying with you ?'

'Hundreds !' replied little Sophy ; and she then added, correcting herself, 'Oh, no ! Of course, not quite so many as that ! We have only the King of Poland and the King of Spain staying with us now ; but there are others coming next week, so we are rather hurrying on the marriage.'

'What, other kings ? And do they all sleep over the cart-horses ?' exclaimed the boy, astonished, calling to mind the splendid apartments at Dallingridge House, in which he had been told that a royal personage once slept, and thinking that, since then, monarchs must have become strangely indifferent to comfort. 'Are they really the *present* kings ?' he inquired.

'Well, they are the *rightful* kings,' answered Sophy. 'The kings that *ought* to reign, and that *will* reign some day if father can make them.'

'Ah,' said Godfrey, feeling relieved, 'I dare say one needn't take so much trouble about *them*. But, only to think of you seeing so much grand company ! How different you are from what I fancied you were at first ! When I first saw you, what do you think I fancied ? I am almost afraid to say, for fear of offending you.'

'People of our religion are never offended,' she answered with dignity, 'unless it is at anything false or wicked.'

'Ah, yes ; I forgot that you were different from us ! Well, what do you think ?—Really, I hardly like to say.'

'People's thoughts are so different,' said Sophy dreamily, as she drew a curious pattern on the gravel-walk with one of her bare feet. 'Father says the in-

sides of our heads are as different as the outsides; and yet there are some stupid creatures who want to force us all to think alike!’

‘Your father must be a very extraordinary person.’

‘Oh, if you only knew what he is!’ exclaimed the little girl enthusiastically. ‘How great, how good, how wonderfully clever!’

‘Yes, I am sure he must be. But now I’ll tell you what I thought when I first saw you. Seeing you with bare feet, and that, and with your frock torn (please don’t be angry), and no socks or petticoats, I thought—I wondered—if your papa was quite a gentleman.’

‘Oh, he is indeed!’ Sophy answered eagerly. ‘Not that such things matter much in our religion; still, we don’t mind it. My father is of very good family.’

‘I am glad of that,’ said Godfrey; ‘for I think it is always nice to know that one is of good family. I said the other day to my mamma, after I had been looking at some of our old pictures, of grand people in armour, and thinking of all the brave things they had done, that I felt in my veins the blood of a thousand generations, and so I really did; but my mamma said, rather crossly, that it was a good many to feel, as it would carry one back quite forty thousand years—supposing everybody had lived to be about forty—and that would be long before God created the world; and I felt rather ashamed, for I didn’t know it would have gone back quite as far as that.’

‘My mamma’s family went back quite as far,’ returned Sophy, flourishing her arm so as to describe a circle round the setting sun. ‘She was a queen over numbers of people of all nations, who are all of them of such old family that the cleverest men in the world can’t say where they came from, or when they began.’

‘Really!’ said Godfrey, in astonishment. ‘I was quite sure you were something very extraordinary. I suppose she was enormously rich?’

‘Well, no; that’s just what she wasn’t, and that’s what I can’t quite understand: but father will explain to me all about it some day. Sometimes, if I come in softly, father, who is growing near-sighted, doesn’t see me, and I find him with his eyes filled with tears; and then I always go away again, for I know he is thinking of her.’

‘I’m sure she must have been a very nice person,’ remarked Godfrey, not quite knowing what else to say.

‘I hate your calling her “nice”!’ exclaimed Sophy impetuously; ‘it sounds so common! She was a queen-angel’

‘Oh, yes, of course!’ said the boy, feeling a little confused; and he then added, in order to turn the subject, ‘What is that large book you have under your arm, with all those papers in it? May I carry it for you?’

‘The papers are the history of my cats, which I am writing myself.’

‘Oh, do let me see it!’

‘Not to-day. It’s too late. The day after to-morrow I will.’

‘The day after to-morrow! May I really come then?’

‘Yes, of course; not to-morrow, because of the Party.’

‘And then you promise me to read the history of your cats?’

‘I promise.’

‘And now, what is the book?’

'It is called *Gil Blas*,' said Sophy, 'and it's lent me to teach me the manners and customs of the world, and all the hard and funny things there are in it. I will read you a little.'

The two children thereupon sat down near the trunk of an old oak-tree, the lower branches of the green hazels waving gently above their heads, and the little girl commenced reading with a good accent from the opening chapter of her book.

"Blas de Santillane, mon père, après avoir longtemps porté les armes pour le service de la monarchie Espagnole, se retira dans la ville où il avait pris naissance. Il épousa une petite bourgeoise qui n'étoit plus dans sa première jeunesse" That's like Janus,' said Sophy, breaking off, in order to show that she understood what she had been reading. 'She's not in her first youth either.'

'Have you got very far in the book?' asked Godfrey, astonished at her erudition.

'Oh, yes! I read a little every day, and I've already got to the part where the Archbishop of Grenada turned *Gil Blas* out of the house because he found fault with his sermons. It was dreadfully unfair. He had liked him very much before, and was always bothering him to say what fault he saw in them, but of course poor *Gil Blas* was afraid to say. But when he bothered him still more, he said, one day, that he didn't think the last one was quite so good as the others; and this made the Archbishop so angry, that he turned him out in the most sudden and unkind way, telling him that he wished him all sorts of prosperities with a little better taste.'

'It was horribly unjust!'

‘Yes ; but father says it’s just like life. It has taught me, at any rate, always to praise what other people write, and never to be angry with those who find fault with what I write myself.’

‘Those are two very good things to learn.’

‘Yes ; but I’ve learnt a great many other lessons besides. For instance, supposing you were to offer to give me a most beautiful ruby ring now, I shouldn’t take it.’

‘Shouldn’t you ?’ returned Godfrey, wishing with all his heart that he possessed some jewel of the kind to lay at the bare feet of his strange little companion. ‘And why not ?’

‘*Because I should be afraid that it might be a false one,*’ she answered. ‘That’s another thing I have learnt from *Gil Blas* ! But listen ! I hear voices.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Godfrey, feeling alarmed at the idea of being caught trespassing, ‘it’s the King of Poland or the King of Spain ?’

‘Oh no, it isn’t !’ answered Sophy, in a whisper, after she had stooped down and peeped under the branches. ‘It’s only Janus and Nelus out courting. She’s going home now to lay the cloth for dinner. Look ! it’s easy to see that they’re sweethearts !’ added the little girl, pointing.

‘Why ?’ asked Godfrey again. It seemed to him that he was learning a great many new things.

‘Oh, because they walk like that,’ answered Sophy, promptly. ‘All sweethearts walk like that about here. Janus always walks first, and her face looks very red, and shines, and she wears her best bonnet. And then Nelus walks a good way behind, and whistles, and knocks the heads off the tall daisies, and generally

chews a piece of grass or straw. Look ! don't you see them ?'

And indeed, when Godfrey, stooping down very low, peeped under the waving hazel branches, he beheld the rustic lovers demeaning themselves precisely in the manner described. They were evidently going towards the house, and soon vanished out of sight, without having perceived the two children.

'I will bring you something from their Party,' said Sophy ; 'for they're going to have a beautiful wedding-cake, and all sorts of nice things.'

'About what time shall I come ?' asked the boy, eagerly.

'Oh, about the time you came to-day. I promise to bring you something very nice.'

'Oh, I really don't care about that, except as coming from you. But, Sophy'—for here a sudden doubt flashed upon him—'would your father like me to come, do you think ? Since you talked so much about "enemies," and all that, I feel so afraid of making you do anything wrong. What did he say when you told him you had met me in the waggon, for of course you told him ? You saw the way John McBean dragged me away from you ? There must have been some reason for it.'

'Was that red-haired man John McBean ?'

'Yes, the man who came out of the Black Horse. But what did your father say about it ?'

'Of course I tell him everything,' answered Sophy, 'and I said, "Abel Reynolds brought me home in his waggon, because it went faster than the cart with Janus and Nelus. There was a boy in it, part of the way," I said, "and four beautiful bell-horses."'

‘But you didn’t tell him my name? Ah, Sophy, that was only half telling!’

‘I didn’t know it then,’ said the little girl, in a contrite voice, ‘so how could I tell him? It was only to-day I knew you were called Godfrey.’

‘Well, you must promise to tell your father next time,’ said the boy; ‘for I shan’t like to come again like a sneak or a poacher. But what did your father say when he heard there was a boy in the waggon?’

‘He only said, “Oh!” and that was all I wanted him to say; and then he went on talking to the Great Prophet about Russia, and the East, and the Tartar hordes, and the battle between the Surs and the Assurs. We’re very busy just now stirring up the Poles.’

‘Oh, really! But you will be sure and tell him next time, won’t you?’ the boy demanded earnestly. ‘You see my reason.’

But at this moment a bell was heard ringing from the neighbouring farmhouse; and little Sophy, exclaiming hastily, ‘Oh, I must go now! There is the tocsin of the soul!’ sprang away from him like a roe-deer, as though to evade the question, and was soon lost to view.

At the appointed day and hour he was again at the trysting-place, and it was not long before he was joined by Sophy, who came accompanied by her white cat, and with her books and papers under her arm. The July day had been oppressively hot; but now a fresh evening breeze had sprung up, and the cool, shady hazel-copse, seemed to Godfrey the most delightful spot in the world.

She at once commenced a glowing description of

the 'marriage feast,' at which she had assisted on the previous morning.

'It would have been such fun,' she said, after she had described the personal appearance of the bride and bridegroom, 'only somehow I didn't care about it *alone*. I wanted you to be there. I meant to have saved you something, too, as I said—in fact, I really *did* save it. It was a beautiful biscuit,' she added sadly, 'with a scalloped edge;' and, as though oppressed by some painful memory, she looked down at her bare feet, with which, following a childish habit, she commenced drawing diagrams upon the gravel. 'I didn't like to take away *too much*,' she said at last, still seeming a little ashamed of herself, 'because they were going to save what's left for the christening.'

'What! are they going to have a christening as well?' asked the boy, astonished at such an excess of dissipation.

'Yes; Janus says they are going to have it some time within the next month, but they haven't fixed on the day yet, and that the hardbake and biscuits and gingerbread-nuts won't be too stale, she hopes, to come in. Only to think of the luck of some people—having a baby directly, when *other people* have to wait whole years!'

'Yes, they are very fortunate. And now go on telling me about the Party.'

'Well,' answered the little girl, somewhat reluctantly, 'I had saved you a caraway.'

'What is a caraway?' Godfrey asked. 'I have heard of a "Jibbaway," or some such name. He is an Indian, and tomahawks people.'

'This is a biscuit,' said Sophy, 'called so because of little black things stuck into it. It is round, and has

scalloped edges, and is most *di-licious*! And, really and truly, I do assure you, I saved you one, and I took one myself; and then I ate mine, and then . . .' and here she blushed and hesitated.

'Ah, I see what happened,' said the boy, smiling; 'I suppose you ate mine too. Never mind!'

'No, that's what I really didn't do!' she protested. 'But I thought as I looked at it that it would be so nice to eat half of it myself, and then give the other half to you.'

'So it would. It was a capital idea.'

'Wait till you've heard the end,' she went on gloomily. 'Well, I ate half of it, and I saved the other half, and I put it on a chair near the mat where I sleep. But in the night I woke up to see if it was safe; and I put out my hand and felt it, and by that time I was so hungry, that . . .'

'That you ate that, too?' suggested Godfrey. 'Well, what *does* it signify? I didn't really want it in the least!'

'No, I didn't eat it all,' continued the contrite little girl. 'I broke off half of it as neatly as I could, and then there was a quarter left; but in the morning, before breakfast, I felt even hungrier than I did in the night.'

'And then you ate it quite all! I can guess all about it. But please don't look so very unhappy; I didn't want it.'

'Well, I *did* eat it; but I saved you this out of it,' said Sophy, who, after searching in the pocket of her one scanty garment, produced a very small piece of paper, in which something precious seemed to be enfolded. 'It's a beautiful large caraway-seed,' she said, presenting it to her companion. 'Take care that it doesn't fall out.'

‘Thank you very much. You’re a funny little thing! I shall not eat it, but keep it inside my watch-case as a remembrance of you, whilst I’m away at school;’ and he slipped the tiny piece of paper into his jacket pocket.

Sophy seemed relieved after this confidence, and began skipping about and playing with her cat, apparently in the highest possible spirits.

‘Did you tell your father, Sophy, that you had met me again yesterday?’ Godfrey now inquired. He had been wishing for some time to ask her this question, but she had seemed always to evade it.

‘Yes, I did,’ she answered, casting down her eyes.

‘Well, and what did he say?’

‘Perhaps if I told you, you might be offended, as you are not one of us,’ she answered doubtfully.

‘Oh no, I shan’t be. Let me hear!’

‘Well, after coming in after the wedding yesterday morning, and making my salaam, I said, “Father, I saw a boy yesterday, and talked with him;” but father hardly answered, and went on with his conversation with the Great Prophet and the two Circassian Chiefs who are staying with us . . .’

‘They didn’t lose much time in coming after the wedding. I wonder you can find room for so many people.’

‘Oh, they don’t all sleep in *beds*,’ replied Sophy, ‘any more than I do. Most of them sleep on rugs and mats, wrapped up in their war-blankets. Well, when father had done speaking, I said again that I had seen a boy, and he said it must be either Moses Weller or Jesse Stubberfield; but I said, “No,” because you were clean and smelt good, and wore Frank clothes,

and that your name was "Godfrey," and that I thought you came from the enemy's country; upon which he only said, "Oh, I suppose it must have been that poor child that they're trying to bring up by clockwork;" after which I salaamed again, and am here.'

'And by that do you suppose that your father meant *me*?' exclaimed Godfrey, shaking himself in order to prove that he was not, at any rate, *made* by clockwork.

'There, now, you are offended!' said the little girl, sorrowfully. 'How easy it is to see that you don't belong to our religion!'

'Really, Sophy,' rejoined the boy, still ruffled, 'you are always talking about your religion, and I can't find out that you have any! You make fun of everything, and seem never to be grave. Nothing seems sacred to you. I wish,' he added thoughtfully, 'that you would some day go to church.'

'Why should I be grave?' asked Sophy, opening her large eyes. 'A little girl with no troubles, and such a happy home! And as for going to church, I'll go, somehow, if you really wish it; though if it makes one grave and unhappy, I would far rather stay away.'

'It makes one *serious*, I think,' said Godfrey, 'but not unhappy. It makes one know that one must die . . .'

'Well, surely that isn't a happy thought! I know, of course, that we shall all die some day, but I try to think of it as little as possible. Father says that if people were to be always thinking of it they would go mad; and the King of Spain said there was a proverb in his country which says, "Neither Death nor the Sun can be looked at fixedly."'

‘I think of it a good deal,’ said the boy, sadly; ‘and I often wonder why Death came at all, and why God allows it. It must be very horrid to lie cold and alone underground. But we shall all awake, though, when the last Trump sounds.’

‘Father and I are going to be burnt when we die,’ remarked Sophy, firmly. ‘That’s settled. At any rate we don’t want to be buried in a churchyard. Perhaps I shall be buried in a garden, or somewhere here;’ and she began digging a little hole with her foot in the dead leaves.

‘Oh, dear Sophy! please don’t talk like that! It is really very wicked!’

Godfrey, at this time, was very devout, and fashioned of the same stuff as that of which martyrs and missionaries are sometimes made. Sophy, however, though apparently a heathen, as well as his inferior in age, seemed to understand and sympathise with his feelings; she assured him that he was merely undergoing a phase.

‘I know all these thoughts,’ she said, kindly. ‘Most people have them when they are *very young*; but they go off again. When I was a very little girl, a woman came to help Janus, who sang hymns, and talked to me about devils and angels, so that one morning I woke up and cried, and was most dreadfully frightened, because I fancied that I had heard the Last Trump. But it was only a French gentleman who was staying here, who had taken down one of the large horns in the hall, and was trying to blow it. My papa had arranged that Sir Peckham should take him out with his beagles; but he wouldn’t go without that large horn. It curled all round his body like a sea-serpent; after that no one was allowed to

speak to me about such things: it made father very angry.'

'I can't understand your father,' said Godfrey, thoughtfully. 'But don't let us talk any more about these serious subjects. You remember you promised me that you would read me the history of your cats.'

'This is only quite a rough copy,' said the young authoress, looking bashful.

'Oh, do let me see it!' exclaimed the boy, holding out his hand for the book.

'No, really you mustn't. I can't spell any hard words yet; and I have written it very untidily: besides, I can *tell* you instead.'

'Then please do,' said Godfrey; upon which the little girl began,—

'Well, the first cat was called "Job," and she . . .'

'*She?* Why, Job was a man!'

'Ah, well, I didn't know that,' explained Sophy, apologetically. 'I happened to hear the name, and I thought it would suit my cat.'

'Why, he's in the Bible!' said Godfrey. 'Fancy your not knowing! He had three friends . . .'

'Yes, that was what I heard. "Job had three friends;" and so had she—other cats—a black cat, a tabby, and a yellow cat. How they did screech and fight, driving poor father almost mad, when he used to be writing in the evening! Then Janus said to Nelus, when he came in for the letters, "There's our cat's three friends; drive 'um away, that's a good lad." And Nelus said, "They seem more like Job's comforters." I don't know what he meant: but as I was searching for a name, she was called Job from that day; and when I told father he laughed.'

'Didn't he tell you Job was a man's name?'

'No; little things like that don't trouble him. Well, this "keeping company" amongst the cats ended, as it nearly always *does* end, in a marriage . . .'

'Mary Parker and John McBean have "kept company" for fifteen years, and they are not married yet,' remarked Godfrey.

'Well, anyhow, it ended in *kittens*,' said the little girl, in a tone calculated to cut short all objection; 'upon which their father, who had been till then a base-born cat, was made a Serene Highness, and a Count of the Holy Roman Empire.'

'A Count of the Holy Roman Empire!'

'Yes: I get these titles out of the newspapers.'

'I remember that you said you were fond of long names. You certainly seem to know a lot of curious things.'

'Yes; I try to learn as much as I can. I wish very much to know everything; and I think I *shall* in time. All these three cats, Job's friends, came from Great Stillingfleet.'

'I don't think there are any cats there now,' said Godfrey. 'Only the old shepherd's dogs, Pompey and Watch, and a hedgehog in the kitchen. I hate hedgehogs; don't you?'

'No; I like them very much. When that one has young ones I've been promised one; but it's too prickly—nothing will marry it. But now,' she added with emotion, 'I must tell you all about the great tragedy. All these three cats took to poaching and were caught in "clams,"* and young Tom Stubberfield—the son of Old Stubberfield, who is Sir Peckham Hickathrift's head-keeper—nailed all their

* A word used in Kent and Sussex to designate a steel trap with teeth, set for vermin.

heads on the posts of the black gate at the end of the pheasant-drive, and made their skins into caps for himself and his family. Would you like to come and look at their heads ?'

'No, thank you,' answered the boy courteously. 'Some other time, perhaps; to-day it is too late.'

'Well,' continued Sophy, 'in Cat History all this is changed, just as my papa says all histories are altered. *There* it is stated that he (the Serene Highness) and his companions were slain in a border-foray by the Stubberfields. I forgot if I told you that he was Warden of the Marshes?'

'No, you didn't. What a lot of titles he had!'

'It is then stated that the two others . . .'

'What, the black cat and the yellow one?'

'Yes; you interrupt. It is then stated that the two other comrades in arms fell upon one another when inflamed with wine, and were so seriously wounded that, being in a strange place, where their wounds could not be dressed, they both of them died.'

'I suppose they killed each other, like the Kilkenny cats?' suggested the boy.

'Yes, they did. I never heard of the Kilkenny cats. Who were they?'

'I don't know,' answered Godfrey; 'but Mary Parker constantly talks about them. They killed each other, and nothing remained but their tails. I believe they were Irish.'

'Who is Mary Parker?'

'She was once my nurse, and now she stays on at Dallingridge; but she hasn't much to do. I like her very much indeed. But do you go on about your cats.'

Encouraged by this, Sophy commenced reading aloud from the book in her hand, though she would

not permit Godfrey to look over her shoulder, lest he should see how phonetically most of the fine words were spelt with which it abounded.

“Woe worth the while for the evil race of the Stubberfieldiuses!——”

‘Are those the Stubberfields?’

‘Yes, they are spoken of in cat history as the “Stubberfieldiuses.” “Woe worth the while for the evil race of the Stubberfieldiuses! A day will dawn when the anger of the great goddess, which has been so long burning against them . . .”’

‘Who is the great goddess?’

‘*Me*, of course. You are always interrupting!’

‘Do go on! How beautifully you *do* write!’

“May their vile offspring never pollute with their degenerated presence the sacred ground of the Sophirian Empire” (that means Stillingfleet) . . .’

‘Called after you?’ asked the boy.

‘Called after me, of course. How you do interrupt!’

‘I don’t think I should have called it the “Sophirian Empire.” There is no “r” in “Sophia.” I think it sounds rather bad; and “degenerated presence” seems somehow almost too fine to be quite right.’

‘I shall not read you any more of it!’ exclaimed Sophy, shutting up her book with apparent annoyance. ‘I can see that you have no soul!’

‘Ah, you’re just like the Archbishop of Grenada in *Gil Blas*,’ said Godfrey, smiling; ‘you won’t let me find a fault, however kindly.’

‘It’s because I am so ashamed of it,’ replied Sophy, colouring. ‘It sounds all right to me till I am laughed at, and then it becomes all nonsense, and I feel inclined

to tear it up. But it's a pity to make me feel this when I work so hard.'

'I am very sorry,' said Godfrey, in a contrite voice. 'I could never write like it myself. It seemed to me so good that I wanted it to be perfect. But do go on.'

'I will *tell* you, instead of reading it, as it is right that you should know,' answered the little girl. 'Well, Job had three kittens: one was drowned, and the two that were kept were called Minna and Brenda. Minna strayed and never came back. I called her, and rattled a saucer of milk against the steps for many a night, but all in vain. Brenda was caught in a clam; but she dragged it home on her foot, and I undid it. It was in the winter-time; and one could easily see, by her footmarks in the snow, that she had been into Sir Peckham Hickathrift's wood to look at her father.'

'The Serene Highness? The cat whose head is nailed on the black gate?'

'Yes. Well, I put pounded alum into the wound in her foot, and it soon got well; and in a short time she gave birth, amongst others, to the beautiful Fleada (so called because she had fleas), who in time became the mother of my lovely Spitfire, my king of cats!' and she commenced embracing her white cat affectionately. 'But really,' she added presently, 'you have now done such a funny, foolish, ridiculous thing, that I don't know—no, indeed I don't know—how I can write it down in Pussy-cat story;' and she began hugging and kissing him anew.

'What has he done?' Godfrey inquired, as he also bent and stroked the white cat.

'Janus says that he's married his grandmother,' re-

plied the little girl gravely. 'And really,' she went on, addressing the unheeding culprit, 'if I had been a fine young cat like you, *would* I have been so benighted as to tie myself up in such a silly way! For shame, Spitfire! and you that might have done so much better!'

Thus did these two children trip lightly and laughingly over the grand mysteries of life and death, drawing their ingenuous conclusions from the result of their own limited experience, and almost half guessing, sometimes, the great riddle which can never be but half guessed at last, and which has baffled alike the fool and the philosopher. They asked themselves, innocently, and wonderingly, whence sprang the first vague intangible germ of what we, in our ignorance, have designated *Life*,—the great underlying spirit of vitality, ever fresh and undaunted, pervading and inspiring all Nature, and which we can neither restrain nor reanimate. They asked too, as innocently, the object and significance of that Other Power, winged, scythed, and shrouded, represented, in the old time, by the *memento mori* of the ancients; the spectre that, strange to say, does *not* assist at many of our feasts, and rightly, since who could 'eat, drink, and be merry' within sight of those hollow eyes and grinning jaws?

CHAPTER VI.

WHILST Godfrey is at school, undergoing the education of most lads of his age, it may be necessary for me, like another Asmodeus, to lift the roofs off one or two of the houses in the neighbourhood of his home,

the occupants of which will have more or less to do with my story.

Like the local guide-books, I shall commence with the Abbey, or rather with its inmates; for enough has already been said with regard to its external architecture to show the reader that it must have resembled, to a certain extent, most other ancient abbeys of the same epoch.

Sir Thomas Peckham Brambletye Satterthwaite Twisleton Hickathrift, fifth baronet, was the present possessor of Poynings Abbey, and of a very fine surrounding property. He was also M.P. for the neighbouring borough of Southerbourne, which he had represented in the Tory interest ever since the retirement of Mr. Erskine St. Clair.

Upon his succession to the family honours, there had been a warm discussion amongst his friends as to which one of his formidable Christian names would be the most appropriate for him to adopt; and 'Peckham' was at last decided upon by vote, his neighbours fearing to crack their jaws by pronouncing either of the three longest of his other names, and yet thirsting for some change after the monotony of two succeeding 'Sir Thomases,' with the prospect of yet another in the future.

Before becoming possessed of Poynings Abbey, the family of Hickathrift had been revered as one of the most ancient in the kingdom, having existed in opulence (it was affirmed) ever since the days of the Heptarchy, and, as many declared, even long before that. In Sir Peckham, too, had merged and centred the fortunes, pictures, plate, and armorial bearings of several other well-known and illustrious families, which, save for him, would have become altogether

extinct; and, as a river becomes gradually swollen through gathering force and volume from its tributaries, one could not help fancying that he had acquired positive physical width and breadth from thus sopping up, as it were, and assimilating, nearly half the blue blood in the county.

And, indeed, when he was seated at the end of his hospitable board in the huge banqueting-hall at the Abbey, blazoned round with heraldic devices, and panelled with the smirking and scowling portraits of the absorbed, annexed, and departed Peckhams, Brambletyes, Satterthwaites, and Twiseltons, it was admitted upon all sides that he was about as good a specimen of the fine old English gentleman as anybody could ever reasonably hope to see. Ill-natured people might have said, perhaps, that he was 'fine' chiefly after the manner of a prize ox or Christmas turkey; for he was a man of enormous height, upon whom, in later years, had fallen the curse of fatness. He had given up hunting because no horse could be found capable of carrying him, and shooting, because his own legs had at last refused to perform their arduous office, except under protest for short intervals, and when aided by the support of a stout stick. His face was so large that, with the exception of his nose, his features seemed almost to be lost in space, and yet there was enough flesh beyond them to have made faces for several ordinary-sized mortals.

He possessed, however, the 'Hickathrift nose'—a nose deserving to be designated a 'limb' rather than a feature, and which it seemed as though all the extinct Peckhams, Brambletyes, Satterthwaites, and Twiseltons had conspired to swell to its present formidable dimensions.

It was strange that Sir Peckham, whose offspring might be likely to inherit, or, at any rate, *be subject to*, this stupendous member, instead of choosing, when the time came for him to marry, a mate from amongst the pug-nosed damsels of his county (and there were many such), should have actually gone out of his way to confirm and exaggerate his type, travelling several inches across the map of England in order to perpetrate what little Sophy would have termed a 'border foray,' and bring back with him, from the far North, a lady as tall as a Life Guardsman, and so terribly 'nosey' that she might almost have passed for a half-starved sister of his own, for good Lady Hickathrift was altogether as gaunt and bony as Sir Peckham was the reverse.

It could not have been difficult to foresee, at the outset, what would be the result should this lady ever become a mother. This event came to pass in the course of a few years, and young Tom Hickathrift's personal appearance fully realised the expectations of those who had thought about the matter at all.

He came into the world with a magnified concentration of the family limb; that is to say, although in other respects an exceedingly handsome boy, he was doomed to go through life looking like 'the Prince with the Nose' in the story-book, without the hope that some day a fairy godmother might come forward and relieve him of his burden.

He became so good-natured and pleasant, however, as he grew older, his figure was so good, and he was so tall and manly-looking, that somehow his nose (if I may make use of such an absurd expression) seemed to *grow upon one*. One liked it better every time one saw it, till, having begun by forgiving it, one ended by

almost forgetting it altogether. Besides which, was it not Thomas Hickathrift's nose; and would not Thomas Hickathrift become, a very few years after the opening of this story, one of the most eligible young men in the whole of England? Would he not, one day, be, in all human probability, not only the owner of Poynings Abbey, with its historic memories, but also of all the broad lands, situated hard by and elsewhere, which were now in the possession of Sir Peckham? And was not his family of such remote antiquity that no one could be found learned enough to translate its motto—doubtless the war-cry of some ancient and powerful race—tall and stalwart as himself—who may have walked about painted blue, reposing probably, after a life of glorious achievement and unprecedented valour, either in barrows or tumuli?

Be this how it may, the 'Hickathrift nose' was very much respected; and more that one fair lady, when Tom came to man's estate, would not only have been proud to call that nose her own, but would—if the occasion had favoured her—have covered it with as many garlands and caresses as were lavished by Titania upon the unsightly head of the translated weaver. But at this period Tom was merely an Eton boy, having lately quitted his ancestral home for those 'distant spires,' and life, in the true sense of the word, had not yet begun for him.

One afternoon, at about this time, Sir Peckham suddenly burst into his wife's boudoir, where she sat gaunt and rigid as a grenadier, working away vigorously at a pair of canvas slippers. From their elephantine proportions it was easy to divine for whom they were intended.

'Raree-show!' he exclaimed, in a voice of thunder,

as he flung down a pamphlet upon the table (he always spoke in the abrupt manner in which we 'of the modern time' are wont to word a telegraphic despatch). 'George Inn! Aztecs!'

Lady Hickathrift took up the pamphlet, the pink cover of which was adorned by rough woodcuts, representing two of the last descendants of an ancient race.

'Indeed, my love, I am extremely sorry that our dear boy is not here—he would have enjoyed looking at these curious little creatures! Are they, indeed, the last of their kind? Dear me! how interesting! . . . But they will, I presume, marry, and thus . . . Ah, I see that they are both boys—two youthful priests—"descendants and specimens of the ancient sacerdotal caste, now nearly extinct, discovered in the idolatrous city of Iximaya."'

'D——d nonsense! Jews! Dwarf-idiots! White-chapel!' exclaimed Sir Peckham telegraphically. His wife, however, could read between the lines, though she generally interpreted his spasmodic utterances even to herself, the result of having had to do so constantly for the benefit of others.

'Nay, love,' she now interposed, 'I can hardly believe they are as you say, Jew-dwarf-idiots from Whitechapel. Indeed I cannot! I cannot believe that Mr. Green, of the George, would wish us to countenance an imposture, knowing so well our position in the place! I feel certain, indeed, that he would hardly have left this for our perusal, or invited us to attend, if . . .'

Here Lady Hickathrift broke off, being apparently too much engrossed with the pamphlet to continue.

The history of these two last remaining Aztec

specimens was, indeed, touchingly pathetic, and the kind-hearted lady felt a lump rising in her throat as she perused it.

It appeared that an American coloured gentleman, a missionary, who was deeply interested in the architectural remains in Mexico and Central America, was once travelling in the province of Vera Paz, beyond the Sierra Madre, when he came suddenly upon the ruins of an ancient city of great magnificence, amongst which, like Marius at Carthage, these two last connecting links between the Present and the Past sat mourning over the decay of their former greatness. After providing them with food, this benevolent gentleman made known to them, in the Maya language, the saving truth which it was his mission to promulgate; and after listening to him with the greatest reverence and attention, the two unfortunate youths resolved at once to embrace Christianity, and depart for ever from a spot which must needs have been fraught with such painful reminiscences for them. Mr. Barnum, with his mermaid and woolly horse, had not yet sought these shores, and so novel and touching an exhibition as was now offered to Lady Hickathrift soon attracted much attention both from scientific and ignorant sight-seers. After a successful campaign in London, the Aztecs were making a tour in the provinces, and hence their arrival at the little town of Poynings, in the centre of which was situated the entrance to the feudal dwelling-place of the Hickathrifts. But what appealed particularly to the sympathies of the British public was the fact that (as was stated in the pamphlet) the money collected upon these occasions was to be spent in procuring for the 'last descendants of the sacerdotal caste' a more enlightened education, and in strength-

ening and confirming them in that faith which they had so wisely embraced.

‘My love, it seems really highly interesting!’ Lady Hickathrift exclaimed, after she had perused the greater part of the pink pamphlet. ‘And I really think we ought to patronise anything that will further religion.’

‘Too late! Gout! Hornblower!’ blurted out Sir Peckham; which meant, when interpreted, that, besides having a slight attack of gout, he had invited the Rector of Dallingridge to dinner, and that after his departure he feared it would be too late to assist at the entertainment at the George.

‘Then I shall certainly not go alone,’ said his devoted wife; and she slowly left the room, in order to make some slight change in her dress for the benefit of Mr. Hornblower.

‘I have put out your ladyship’s “philimot,”’* said Miss Peacock, her ladyship’s maid, when she had gained the precincts of her dressing-room. ‘And your ladyship’s new *turban*, with the yellow bird of *paroucdice*.’

‘Birds of paradise are *always* yellow, Peacock,’ said Lady Hickathrift, who prided herself upon instructing while she commanded her abigail. ‘You talk as though the creature was dyed! But only Mr. Hornblower is dining here to-night, therefore I shall not change my *coifoor*.’ (Amongst other things, Lady Hickathrift was excessively proud of her knowledge of French.)

‘Ho! what a disappointment to Mr. Green of the George!’ exclaimed Miss Peacock, aghast. ‘And me that thought the poor ‘eathens would like to look at a bird that came from their own countries! They all

* *Feuille morte*. A colour once in vogue, and thus pronounced by the vulgar.

consider your ladyship such a first-rate dresser, that they will come from far and wide and run their blood to water when there's a chance of catching a sight. However, Mr. Green must make up his mind to a hempty 'ouse to-night!'

'I see no reason, my good Peacock, why these people should flock to see me,' rejoined Lady Hickathrift, flattered nevertheless.

'Ho, my lady! your ladyship is known to lead the fashion about here!' replied Peacock reproachfully. 'I do believe the Miss Spearinks have gone and himitated your ladyship's new turband already! Ho them Miss Spearinks! anything like their hairs and graces I never came in contract with! However, they'll have it all their own way to-night, and no mistake! When I went over just now to buy a piece of wadding to cover your ladyship's busk, I heard the remark passed of how your ladyship was such a splendid dresser. "Her ladyship," I said, "'as not many *twilights*, but she have's *little and good*.'"'

'I should imagine that I possess quite as many as the Miss Spearings!' answered her ladyship, somewhat nettled. 'And, dear Peacock, do pray learn your own language before you pretend to speak French! It is not "*twilight*," it is "*tualight*,'" and she rushed innocently from Scylla to Charybdis.

Lady Hickathrift was standing before her dressing-table, occupied with some mysterious rite connected with the toilet; whilst, in order to economise time, Peacock was standing behind her engaged in slightly tightening the lace of what looked like a Roman warrior's cuirass. She had not yet removed her head-gear, which, with its nodding ribbons and plumes, added the sublime element to the ridiculous. During

this performance, in fact, and as she occasionally endeavoured to check any too sudden movement made by her attendant by an admonitory stamp of the foot, her ladyship, whose physiognomy was of a somewhat equine cast, reminded one instinctively of a determined 'crib-biter' undergoing its grooming, or of a sable-plumed hearse-horse being driven deliberately with a stay-lace.

'She's terrible *hargumentious* at times, and nags *hateful*!' Miss Peacock had once confided to Mr. Green of the George. 'But one can always come over her with a little palaver!' Upon which Mr. Green had 'passed the remark' that he should like to know where that man or woman ever *stept* whom Miss Peacock could not 'come over' by the charms of her person and of her mind?

Upon the present occasion Miss Peacock, being anxious to go herself to the entertainment, and anxious, therefore, that her ladyship should not require her at her usual hour of undressing, did so far 'come over' her mistress that she induced her to promise that she might perhaps go after all, and to array herself in the dress, at once gorgeous and grotesque, which it was her wont to wear at entertainments of the kind; and she shortly afterwards descended the broad staircase leading to the banqueting-hall in all the glories of her 'philimot' and blue turban, with the tail of the bird of paradise, which had somehow got awry, sticking up like the war-plume of a North American Indian.

Mr. Hornblower had only just commenced the narration of his second anecdote—which usually came after the cheese—when Lady Hickathrift, who prided herself upon the courtesy of her manners, rose from her

chair, and, seizing the hand of the Rector, began an elaborate excuse explanatory of her early retreat from the dinner-table.

‘Good night, good night, dear Mr. Hornblower,’ she concluded, courtesying after the old fashion, whilst the form of the palpitating Peacock was seen hovering in the doorway, carrying a richly-embroidered Indian shawl. ‘Good night again, my dear Mr. Hornblower. *Noblesse oblige*, you know!’ And with a second courtesy she swept majestically out of the banquetting-hall.

Xtacumbi and Upaxaelulah, the last of the Aztecs,—or, as they were designated in the pink pamphlet, ‘the surviving remnant of an ancient and singular order of priesthood called Kaanas, which had accompanied the first migration of this people (the Iximayans) from the Assyrian plains,’—were a weird and dwarfish-looking couple, weak and wavering in their gait. Their heads, too, were ‘fearfully and wonderfully made;’ and it was even surprising—according to the theory of the ‘survival of the fittest’—that brain, spine, and legs having apparently struck work simultaneously, these unfortunate young men should have survived at all to tell of the departed glories of their race.

There was, however, a pathetic reason for their debility. ‘Forbidden’ (the pink pamphlet explained) ‘by inviolably sacred laws from intermarrying with any persons but those of their own caste, they (the sacerdotals) had dwindled down, in the course of many centuries, to a few insignificant individuals, diminutive in stature and imbecile in intellect. . . .’

They went through their performances with great dignity and docility, but sadly, as with the apathy of the fatalist; and it was easy to perceive that the

strange vicissitudes they had undergone had permanently affected their spirits, lending to every movement an indescribable tinge of melancholy.

The tall 'sacerdotal'—he was tall only by comparison, measuring some thirty-four inches in stature instead of thirty, the height of his companion—did indeed appear at moments to weary of the inexorable destiny which compelled him thus, day after day, to go through performances which must have seemed to partake of the ignominy and monotony of the treadmill. One would have fancied, from his expression, that his proud spirit occasionally rebelled, and would no longer brook such bitter humiliation, or else that the contrast with his glorious antecedents oppressed him so painfully that he was almost unable at times to proceed. To find himself alone—save for one solitary companion, mortal as himself—to be apparently in a chronic state of debility, to have forsworn, in a moment of desperation, the ancient faith of his fathers, and to be exhibited thus in a common tavern, in a foreign land, was not all this enough, and more than enough, to account for the expression of languor and melancholy which overspread the countenance of the elder of the two surviving 'sacerdotal remnants?'

Lady Hickathrift was greatly interested in the performance. She occupied one of the best places in the front row of chairs, as became her position, so that the Miss Spearings—daughters of the local postmaster and linendraper, newly established as milliners—who sat immediately in her rear, by the side of Miss Peacock, had ample opportunity for studying the strange formation of her imposing head-gear.

After singing several of their national songs, and performing a limp and tottering sacerdotal dance, the

unfortunate young men went through one verse of an English hymn, and the proceedings, so far as they were concerned, terminated; though, before they finally withdrew, they presented a few copies of their biography to some of the most distinguished of the assembled company.

It is needless to say that Lady Hickathrift was one of the first to receive this interesting memoir, which she accepted very graciously from the hands of the taller of the Aztecs.

'Poor little manikin-pips!' exclaimed Miss Peacock, as he presented her, secondly, with a copy of his history, perceiving that, next to her mistress, she was the most ridiculously attired female in the room, and probably concluding, therefore, that she was a person of distinction, and so saying, she patted him on the head with benevolent condescension. The unfortunate 'remnant,' however, had doubtless been unaccustomed for long years to the familiarities of the fair sex, and his whole being seemed suddenly to become flooded with soft emotions. He was thinking, perhaps, of those lovely creatures who once graced the now ruined halls of Iximaya, and whose semblances, graven upon the ancient temples and palaces of that historic land, proclaim that they belonged to 'a microcephalous type of human organization.' What a contrast to these temples,

'grand and moss'd,
Mighty as any castle sung,
And old when oldest Ind was young,
With threshold Christian never cross'd,'*

must have seemed the assembly-rooms at the George Inn at Poynings; and how must Miss Peacock's sym-

* Joaquin Miller.

pathetic movement have affected the desolate heart of the ill-fated young man ! As a proof of his emotion, he suddenly reached out his hand with a movement resembling that of an ape, and clutching tightly hold of the 'tail feather' of Miss Peacock's bonnet, endeavoured to draw her towards him, whilst the surprise occasioned by so unexpected a demonstration caused her to utter a shrill and piercing scream. But in a moment the eagle eye of the Rev. Mr. Carver (for such was the name of the American missionary) recalled the wandering fancy of the infatuated 'sacerdotal.' He smiled faintly, gave a slight lurch forward, passed his delicate hand hurriedly across his strangely-shaped brow, and returning to the raised platform, in a few seconds 'Richard'—or rather 'Upaxaelulah'—was 'himself again.'

The Rev. Mr. Carver was a tall, thick-set, negro, with a shining ebon complexion, flat feet, rolling eyes, and a scrupulously clean tie and shirt-front. He had accompanied the Aztec remnants during their peregrinations through Great Britain and Ireland, acting towards them, according to his own account, in the united capacities of cicerone, spiritual adviser, and interpreter, whilst exercising over them the supervision of a parent. After the two youths had withdrawn, this gentleman did not disdain in his turn to minister to the amusement of the company ; and it became apparent that, besides being professedly an earnest and exemplary Christian, he was an exceedingly funny man, his religion not being of that kind which fosters a morbid melancholy.

Having begun with anecdotes of a serious and pathetic nature, relating to the cruel treatment by American slave-owners of some of his own coloured

brethren, of their extraordinary piety and powers of endurance, &c., he proceeded to give several interesting examples of the singular power of mesmerism, electro-biology, and animal magnetism, powers which, he declared, were only now in their infancy, but which would become, some day, a staff in the hands of the godly, and a dangerous weapon when wielded by the emissaries of the devil. Having thus, in the first instance, affected his audience to tears, and succeeded, secondly, in arousing their keenest interest, he finally proceeded to convulse them with laughter, by relating to them ludicrous incidents of negro life, stories of the most diverting and entertaining kind, and which might yet be published on the house-tops, so free were they from anything which might have tended to shock or scandalise the prejudices of the British provincial female mind; so that the whole audience departed highly delighted with themselves, the Aztec remnants, Mr. Carver, and the world in general.

Of course (as Mr. Carver himself admitted), like all who have become prosperous through a rigid adherence to duty and religion, he was not without his detractors. These, however, were chiefly persons interested in rival concerns—of the ‘spotted baby’ and ‘pig-faced lady’ kind; and it was not difficult to perceive that their malice was generated by jealousy at his success. Some of these evilly-disposed persons had even carried their ‘lying and slandering’ to such an extent as to declare that Mr. Carver himself was the father of the said ‘remnants,’ he having married early in life a Hebrew lady of weak intellect, who had died shortly after giving birth to the phenomena; so that (reversing the behaviour of the pelican in the wilderness) he was actually preying, as it were, upon his own young!

‘But then,’ as Mr. Carver concluded by remarking, ‘if we gave credit to half the evil reports we hear, where, ladies and gentlemen, should we find an honest man?’

A few moments before the assembly-rooms were cleared, and just as Mr. Carver was collecting some of the articles of which he had made use to illustrate his experiments, one of his myrmidons pushed aside the curtain through which the Aztecs had disappeared, and presented him with a note, telling him at the same time that a messenger was waiting for an answer; and before the curtains closed a good-looking young man, in the garb of a rustic, was seen for a moment by the departing company. This was no other than ‘Nelus,’ groom of the chambers and factotum to Francis St. Clair of Little Stillingfleet, whose usually beaming countenance—owing, no doubt, to his recent marriage and to the impending christening—wore a somewhat scared and harassed expression, which the sudden glare of a well-lighted room after a three miles’ walk in the dark had perhaps helped to intensify.

The note which was delivered to the missionary ran as follows:—

‘Little Stillingfleet, July 18th, 1829.

‘Mr. Francis St. Clair presents his compliments to the Rev. — Carver; and though he has not the pleasure of his acquaintance, he writes to say that it would gratify him extremely if he and the two interesting Aztec specimens now under his protection could make it convenient to pay him a visit of a few days at his house in this neighbourhood. The great interest Mr. St. Clair has always taken in the descendants of ancient races must be his excuse for making this request without having had the honour of a previous introduction.’

To this invitation Mr. Carver, without consulting the Aztec specimens, immediately replied :—

‘The Rev. Josiah Carver to Francis St. Clair, Esq.—Yours to hand. Aztec specimens and self will be proud to accept the hospitality of an English gentleman, and will (D.V.) wait on Mr. St. Clair at his residence to-morrow, after the morning representation.’

‘I don’t like that “D.V.”’ Francis St. Clair remarked when he received this answer. ‘Ten to one the fellow is a scoundrel.’

Nevertheless, on the following afternoon Mr. Carver, and the two last specimens of the ancient sacerdotal caste, repaired to Little Stillingfleet in a one-horse fly.

CHAPTER VII.

‘FRANCIS ST. CLAIR of Stillingfleet,’ as he was usually styled, in order to distinguish him from his brother, resided at his farm very much after the strange fashion to which his daughter had casually referred whilst conversing with her new playmate. His habits were primitive, and his corporeal wants few. As for his ambitions, they were so vast, and so impossible of fulfilment, that—as extremes are said to meet—he became in the eyes of the world at large one of the least ambitious men upon the face of the earth—a man who not only scorned the ordinary comforts and refinements of life, but who had outraged almost every one of its social laws, and thrown away for ever his own chances of success. I do not know whether he himself

looked upon his career as a failure, or if what the world might have pronounced to be a success would have seemed like a success to him. Living in a realm teeming with the creations of a rich and vivid imagination, he was less dependent than most other men upon the actual realities of life, whilst whether he was surrounded by luxury or squalor affected him but little. He had associated himself with a small band of enthusiasts, who were one and all of them interested in the mysterious cause for which he himself laboured without ceasing—the grand political scheme of which the ignorant outside world knew absolutely nothing, though its ramifications were so numerous and complicated that they were said to traverse and encompass the whole continent of Europe, and a great part of the East, as with a network of electric wires. One of the chief drawbacks connected with ‘the Great Cause’—as Mr. St. Clair and his friends were wont to designate it—seemed to consist in its extreme vagueness, and hence it was that those votaries whose precise minds insisted upon a particular detail of its tenets, were generally observed to withdraw in disappointment from what was, apparently, too vast and intangible to be subjected to ordinary laws, or even comprehended at all, except in the abstract. It was evidently a scheme which could be better described by a wide flourish of the hand in the direction of the far sunset, or by sundry bold sweeping hieroglyphics, traced with the point of a walking-stick upon the gravel of a garden-path, than by any of the words employed to convey ordinary ideas. But whatever the ‘Great Cause’ may have seemed to others, it was a reality to Francis St. Clair, and to him the horizon was golden with hope. He was, indeed, pre-eminently hopeful by nature. Somewhere or an-

other I have read a story about an economical couple who, when grass was scarce, tied green spectacles on the nose of their cow, and sent her out to graze upon shavings. Francis St. Clair had, as it were, gone through life in green spectacles, the greater portion of mankind perceiving only dry shavings where he imagined fair pastures; but then—as he would have been almost sure to remember, before allowing any such ignorant surmises to affect his peace—‘the greater portion of mankind’ do not themselves know shavings from grass!

He was at this time about two-and-forty years of age, with a tall, lithe figure, and a keen, thoughtful face of an Oriental type—an Oriental uncorrupted by indolence and luxury, a child of the desert, an Ishmaelite, inured to danger and fatigue, rather than a luxurious inhabitant of Cairo or Stamboul. His countenance wore all the dignity and calm of that of a benevolent philosopher, the man whom nothing could surprise, nothing disconcert, and whose temper no storm could ruffle. It would seem as though the pageant of life passed him by, with its mummers and masquers, whilst he stood looking on at it from the wayside, taking no part in the proceedings; for, with regard to the smaller things of existence, he had endeavoured to follow the precept of Sainte-Beuve, ‘*Etre et rester en dehors de tout*’—a condition which he had not arrived at without a good deal of severe schooling.

On account of his unorthodox religious opinions, which did not permit him to assist at any performances of public worship, Francis St. Clair was looked upon by most of the neighbouring clergy as an Atheist; for it was then, as now, customary to brand with this appellation all those persons whose minds, being constitutionally

unfitted to accept theories apparently irreconcilable with reason and science, had either received under protest, or contemptuously rejected altogether, such great mysteries as the doctrine of Original Sin and the belief in Everlasting Punishment. He was himself of opinion that the fact of his wearing a beard—a great rarity in these days—had given more offence to his conventional neighbours than any of his theological and political convictions, either indicated or expressed ; and, indeed, Mr. Pettigrew, the new curate, little foreseeing the present bearded condition of the Anglican priesthood, and ignoring or forgetting many representations of sacred and holy persons, had gone so far as to declare that, whenever he saw an individual who did not shave he knew him by intuition to be an Atheist ; and he added that he had only once been mistaken. He did not condescend to mention the name of this exception, who was, perhaps, merely thrown in to prove the rule ; but it was evident, at any rate, that he spoke from conviction. Francis St. Clair, when these words were repeated to him, could not but plead guilty to the beard, which he had permitted to grow partly from indolence, and partly in consequence of his failing eyesight, which rendered shaving a truly arduous undertaking ; for, as his brother had once remarked, ‘ a judgment ’ was falling upon him, and he was at the present time in great danger of becoming blind. The growing of his beard was, he admitted, a voluntary and determined act of insubordination and unconventionality. As to beliefs or unbeliefs, he denied that they were under the control of the individual, and he therefore held his conscience absolved from any of the consequences which might accrue from his opinions. He contended

that these were based upon the dictates of reason and the teachings of science; and that, as neither reason nor science remained at a standstill, he was at liberty to vary and modify his own private convictions as it seemed good to himself, provided that he never indulged in the impertinence of becoming a proselytiser, '*Live and let live*' being the first commandment in his decalogue.

One of the most appreciative of Shelley's recent biographers* writes thus upon the subject of the poet's spiritual convictions,—

'He believed so firmly and intensely in his own religion — a kind of passionate positivism, a creed which seemed to have no God because it was all God — that he felt convinced he only needed to destroy accepted figments for the light which blazed round him to break through and flood the world with beauty. Shelley can only be called an Atheist in so far as he maintained the inadequacy of hitherto received conceptions of the Deity, and indignantly rejected that Moloch of cruelty who is worshipped in the debased forms of Christianity. He was an Agnostic only in so far as he proclaimed the impossibility of solving the insoluble and knowing the unknowable.'

'With a difference,' these words were singularly applicable to Francis St. Clair. The difference lay in the fact that he never made any attempt to 'destroy accepted figments.' He denied no more than he destroyed, and deserved, by reason of his passionate love of Nature, rather to have been called a Pantheist than a disbeliever in the existence of the Deity. He was sustained and supported in that loneliness enforced by

* John Addington Symonds.

the holding of opinions so greatly in the minority, by a spirit of supreme toleration, which might even have tempted him to exclaim with the Pharisee, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are !' were it not for the humility engendered by the contemplation of two great mysteries—the mysteries of Life and Death, in the presence of which the wise man is even as the fool. This Pantheistic love of Nature, resulting in a horror of all that was false and meretricious, and which rendered so odious to him the conventionalities of society, had influenced him in all the most important acts of his life ; and his marriage with the 'gipsy maid' had, no doubt, proceeded partly from his admiration of all that was genuine and spontaneous in woman. This marriage, though stigmatised by his friends and relations as an unpardonable and irreparable error, had, contrary to their expectations, turned out happily. Women are known to be wonderfully adaptive, and no mere absence of worldly wisdom, or ignorance of the usages of fashion in the maiden of his choice, would have offended the sensibilities of the youthful enthusiast. He had started prepared to forgive anything but that innate vulgarity of mind which is not always the sure accompaniment of rags, any more than refinement can be said to be that of soft raiment ; but he had found nothing to forgive.

Sophy's mother had apparently belonged to that very select and still diminishing contingent, the aristocracy of the soul. He had moulded and educated her into a woman after his own heart ; and the first grief she had ever given him had been caused by her early death. Since he had been left desolate, no other woman had seriously engaged his sympathies, or played any

active part in his life. He had devoted himself exclusively to the furtherance of his mysterious political scheme, and to the broader development of his spiritual opinions, describing himself to those who would have failed to comprehend any more complicated appellations, by some such names as his little daughter had caught up, parrot-like, from his lips, or occasionally even, with certain mental reservations, as an 'Early Christian who did not exactly believe in Christianity.'

On the second evening after the arrival of Mr. Carver and the 'Aztec remnants,' Francis St. Clair and his political mentor, 'the Great Prophet' of 'the Great Cause,' were seated together in one of the centre rooms of the white-gabled farmhouse. Probably it had once been the sitting-room or parlour, though in its present condition it bore more resemblance to an armoury, its walls being ornamented with a variety of ancient British and foreign weapons, together with many of the murderous implements made use of in modern warfare.

The Great Prophet, at whose feet Mr. St. Clair sat (politically), had not acquired his appellation by reason of any physical magnitude. Externally, he was a person of a mean and insignificant presence, and his superiority to the rest of mankind was evidently entirely mental. He was lightly, nay, almost transparently, clad in loosely-made garments of raw silk; he wore a perpetual fez; and, when walking abroad, shuffled uncomfortably in thin heelless slippers, which he was careful to remove before recrossing the threshold.

Most European languages were apparently familiar to him, but it was his habit to employ the Oriental idiom, and to speak, as it were, in parables. A mystery hung seemingly over both his nationality and his age,

which Mr. St. Clair was either indifferent to or had failed to penetrate. In conversation with the uninitiated he usually described him (with a flourish of the hand towards the distant horizon) as "an Asiatic mystic, acquainted with many of the keys of human knowledge, who has explored the mysteries of the Ansari in their hidden caverns, in whose possession are the most recondite secrets of the Druses, and who dwelt with the Yezedis, or devil-worshippers, and witnessed their dark rites, previous to associating himself with our friends, the Turks of the Soofi heresy.' After which 'the uninitiated,' though awed and interested, felt that they knew very little more of the mystic's private history than before.

Upon the present occasion he was smoking, seated cross-legged on a divan in the embrasure of the bay-window, in front of which stood three suits of rusted mediæval armour, which, propped up, as they were, upon frames, presented a very lifelike and martial aspect, giving to the room, from the outside, an appearance of being filled with armed men.

Francis St. Clair, either out of compliment to his much-honoured guest, or from a habit contracted in Eastern lands, had assumed precisely the same posture in the left-hand corner of the window-seat, where he sat, apparently toying with some ancient flint lance-points and arrow-heads, which had been lately exhumed in the vicinity of Poynings Abbey. Sir Peckham Hickathrift, knowing the passion of his eccentric neighbour for all manner of antiquities, was in the habit of sending him these implements, as an inexpensive present, in relays, just as they were dug up, and there was now a sufficient quantity of them at Little Stillingfleet to have mended most of the surrounding roads,

could their possessor have brought himself to employ them in so useful a manner. Like the Great Prophet, Mr. St. Clair wore the fez; he had removed his coat, and even his fine linen shirt was left open at the throat, whilst his feet, like those of his little daughter, were bare, his slippers being placed by the side of the divan. All three windows were open, as was also that of the room beyond, so that the Prophet and his disciple had the satisfaction of knowing that they were sitting in a direct current of air, a condition of things which seemed to be somehow mysteriously interwoven with the tenets of the Great Cause.

‘Where is the “fair Sophia”?’ Mr. St. Clair demanded, looking up for a moment from the contemplation of his arrow-heads. ‘Sophia’ was by no means ‘fair;’ he was merely quoting from the ‘Ballad of Lord Bateman.’ Like his daughter, he was fond of innocent and obvious quotations. ‘Things taken from other things,’ as she had remarked to Godfrey.

Obedient to the clapping of hands, little Sophy came running towards the window from the further end of the garden.

‘What is it?’ she asked, as she vaulted lightly upon the window-ledge close to where her father was seated.

‘Where, Sophy, are our interesting guests, the illustrious sacerdotal?’ inquired Mr. St. Clair, with a certain melancholy playfulness. ‘Where are “those last living specimens of an antique race so nearly extinct”?’ he continued, quoting now from the pages of the pink pamphlet.

‘They are in the kitchen-garden,’ answered the little girl, ‘eating gooseberries with Mr. Carver. When I came away, the biggest “sacerdotal” wasn’t feeling very well.’

‘And naturally, my child, if ever since he left us he has been plunging into these excesses! Run back, Sophia, and explain to Carver and “the illustrious microcephali” the dangers attending a surfeit of the British gooseberry; *you*, who are so fully competent to write a treatise upon the deleterious effects of unripe crab-apples and green sloes, warn these impetuous Iximayans to desist; when one is the last of one’s race it is impossible to be too careful of one’s digestion—eh, Sophia? Ah . . . the child is off again!’

Francis St. Clair addressed this last remark to the Great Prophet, and returned once more to the contemplation of his arrow-heads.

Little Sophy delivered her message; but instead of returning to the house with the Aztecs and their guardian, she wandered through the flower-garden and over the rustic bridge until she found herself in the midst of the hazel-copse.

In the morning she had been here also, for it was Godfrey’s last day at home, and he had promised that, if possible, he would come and bid her good-bye. He was not there, however, and she had gone away disappointed. Now, she had a great wish to look again at the place where she had seen her new playmate for the last time. It was too late, however, to go very far; so, after looking sadly at the gnarled oak-tree with its rustic bench, near to which she had read to Godfrey from the pages of *Gil Blas*, she was about to retrace her footsteps, when she observed Moses Weller, the youngest son of the old shepherd at Great Stillingfleet, in the act of climbing over the five-barred gate which separated the two properties. He was calling out to her to wait for him, and waving his arms like the sails of a windmill. The little girl at once turned, and went to-

wards him, for he was an old acquaintance. With him and his brothers she had often made spirited attacks upon the bird's-nesting and cat-trapping Stubberfields, on the other side, causing them to disgorge their ill-gotten booty, and she regarded him as a firm ally, notwithstanding that she had recently had a slight misunderstanding with him upon the subject of his ill-treatment of a toad. He was the bearer of a small brown-paper parcel; and telling her that it was sent her by 'young muster,' and that she was to open it immediately, he thrust it hastily into her hand and returned by the way he had come. The parcel was about the size of an ordinary brick—one side of it seeming to be rounded and slightly indented, whilst the other was smooth and even to the touch. It was very nearly the first present that Sophy had ever received, and notwithstanding Moses's injunction to open it immediately, she could not resist the temptation of revelling for a little while longer in a state of blissful anticipation, half fearful lest her treasure should vanish altogether if she began to untie the string which enclosed it. Just as her eager little fingers were busy with a somewhat complicated knot, her father again summoned her after his peculiar fashion; and in order that the pleasures of hope might be still further prolonged, she placed the precious packet under a fuchsia-bush not far from the porch, and hastened into the house.

Upon entering the sitting-room, she perceived Mr. Carver standing in the centre of the apartment in the attitude of an orator or expositor. One of his large black hands, with its white nails, and ornamented with a diamond ring, was placed upon the head of Xtacumbi, the smaller and younger 'sacerdotal,' who looked up at him with the cowering expression of a performing ape

anxious to obey instructions. The elder and taller of the Aztecs had fallen apparently into a comatose state at the foot of an armchair, with his head resting upon the seat. Mr. Carver had evidently been expounding his theories relative to his interesting charges, and he was now addressing himself to Xtacumbi and inviting him to make his obeisance previous to retiring for the night, for it was the custom of the 'remnants' to court repose at a comparatively early hour. It was their delight (Mr. Carver was also explaining) to sing at the beginning and end of each day a few verses of a hymn. Without performing this act of devotion, neither Upaxaelulah nor Xtacumbi could have rested with a clear conscience.

'Stand up, Xtacumbi,' said Mr. Carver, in a firm and very distinct tone, as he fixed his eyes in a peculiar manner upon the trembling little creature.

'Xtacumbi is a very bright youth,' he continued, turning to Mr. St. Clair. 'But he is this evening in a highly nervous condition. He places his hand to his cheek in consequence of having suffered from an attack of ear-ache. As for Upaxaelulah, he is downright sick from the excitement he has undergone during this pleasant and salubrious afternoon. Xtacumbi, you can salute this gentleman and his family before retiring.'

But instead of doing as he was bidden, the 'sacerdotal,' either from carelessness engendered by fatigue, or from previous association, began, in a faltering voice, and with a strong nasal twang, to give utterance to some strangely incoherent sounds, as though it had been his wish to sing one of his national songs which had escaped his memory. At last, however, he delivered himself with difficulty of the first verse of the well-known hymn which commences,—

‘Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,’

although not until after Mr. Carver (taking advantage of a moment when the Great Prophet had stooped to adjust his chibook, and when Mr. St. Clair had turned his clouded gaze once more in the direction of his arrow-heads) had administered a vicious pinch to the ear which the unfortunate youth had been so anxiously protecting, at the same time jobbing him quickly with his knee in the region of the stomach. Thus encouraged, Xtacumbi commenced going through his melancholy evensong of praise. The ‘fair Sophia’ had observed both the pinch and the movement with the knee.

‘Poor little thing!’ she whispered in her father’s ear. ‘Look, he doesn’t like doing it! and look how cross that horrid black man is to him! Do tell him not to go on!’

‘My dear Mr. Carver,’ said Mr. St. Clair, who was even now beginning to be influenced by the opinion of his daughter, ‘this is “Liberty Hall.” An Englishman’s home should be not only his own castle, but that of his guests. Do, therefore, exactly what you all like best, and pray follow whatever mode of worship is most congenial to your feelings and to those of these illustrious young men; but if, as I fancy, this performance is irksome both to yourself and to them, and is only gone through in order to conform to what you may imagine are our religious prejudices, I must beg of you to dispense with it altogether. Perhaps it would relieve the feelings of this promising youth could he be made to comprehend that, as yet, we have identified ourselves with none of the classified religious opinions of the day, and that we are, therefore, unaccustomed to all outward forms of worship.’

The expression of Mr. Carver's face during this speech was, as the saying goes, 'as good as a play.' He replied, however, merely by a low bow; and after arousing the elder 'remnant' he left the room, in order to preside at his charges' arrangements for the night.

'The Aztecs are miserable impostors,' said Mr. St. Clair, as soon as they had departed, addressing himself to the Great Prophet, 'but Carver is a grand study!'

'A strange interest attaches to the observation of the difference of race,' answered the mystic. 'Allah is all-powerful. To him belongeth dominion. He giveth life and causeth death. He hath created both the little and the great! Yet even in the individual it is possible to perceive that warfare between Sur and Assur which still continues to wage without ceasing, as it will continue to do to all time!'

'Oh, father!' interrupted Sophy, for she had never been cowed into silence in the presence of her elders like some children of her age; 'I like the little men, but I can't bear that Carver! He has such horrid white nails!' And she shuddered in disgust.

'Allah!' rejoined Francis St. Clair, ignoring his daughter's speech and inclining his head reverently, (or his latest scientific substitute), 'is indeed great. Mr. Carver, I should imagine, has already enrolled himself amongst the host of the Assurs?'

'Individual types, like events, revolve in cycles,' remarked the Great Prophet, 'and are continually recurring. Good and evil, wisdom and folly: it is upon these that the changes are perpetually being rung.'

'By-the-by!' exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, suddenly relinquishing his arrow-heads, 'was it not this evening

that we were expecting the return of our embassy to the Teuton Swine ?’

‘It was indeed this evening,’ answered the Prophet, glancing up at the timepiece, ‘and at about this very hour. But the blow which is to convulse Christendom will fall neither to-day nor to-morrow. . . .’

‘Run, Sophia !’ exclaimed the disciple, fearful lest his little daughter should overhear some project for meting out to the whole of Europe the fate which Guy Fawkes once intended for ‘King, Lords, and Commons :’ ‘run, my child, and see that the misguided Jane does not again serve up for our supper the accursèd flesh of pig ; and impress upon her, furthermore . . . Ah !’ he added again, almost disappointed at the fleetness of his willing messenger, ‘the child is gone !’

Sophy, indeed, needed no second bidding : she was already panting with impatience to look at her present ; and after delivering her father’s message to Jane, she slipped quietly into the garden and ran eagerly towards the fuchsia-bush.

There lay the precious packet just as she had left it, and seizing upon it hastily she carried it up to her little room in triumph. Once there she could no longer pause to untie the string, a pair of scissors was close at hand, and in a moment Godfrey’s present was displayed upon the table. Sophy gazed at it for some time in astonishment. The parcel contained the tortoise, wrapped round in the paper of directions furnished by the naturalist, whilst bound tightly to its breast was a New Testament in a black leather cover.

‘Oh, what an extraordinary thing !’ exclaimed the little girl, as ‘Alexander,’ overjoyed at regaining his freedom, trudged off in the direction of a neighbouring pin-cushion. ‘But I dare say I shall get very fond of

it in time.' And she then turned to the contemplation of the sacred volume. 'He was determined that I should read the Bible somehow,' she remarked, smiling. 'He is exactly like his friend Captain Cook.'

CHAPTER VIII.

IN the first early days of spring, before the waving 'lambs' tails' were yet fully out in the hazel-copse, and when the primroses and cuckoo-flowers wore still a pale starved look amongst the dead leaves of a departed year, Godfrey St. Clair came home to spend his Easter holidays at his beloved Dallingridge. For the very soil and air of his native place were dear to him : and he even wondered at his own facility for really *loving* what was, after all, only blind, mute, deaf, and irresponsible. But it did not appear to be irresponsible *to him*. A thousand voices, understood by him alone, seemed to welcome his home-coming. The fern was as yet too young to shelter him ; but each tiny crooklet that upraised its tender head was full of feathery promise. The old beech-trees were clad only in their mossy velvet hose, their branches being all bare, save for a little green pennon waving at the tip of each twig—every one of which was to Godfrey even as a little banner of welcome. The garden-beds were empty, except for their purple and golden regiments of crocuses, and the little tufts of dark shining leaves, amongst which were lurking the pink and azure *hypaticas*. The white magnolia, leaning against the southern wall of the old house, wore still its winter garments of folded matting ; for though the sun was warm at midday, the mornings and evenings were yet

smarting under the keen breath of winter ; but to the returning schoolboy this was the breath of the winter of his home, and he loved it.

The house, also, was filled with old inanimate friends, over and above the live ones.

The grim portraits of ancient warriors, of gallant cavaliers, and of smiling almond-eyed ladies, draped in the scanty garments of the olden time, looked down upon him, as he fancied, with kind, approving glances. The ancestor, however, for whom he felt the most real sympathy was represented in a portrait of more modern date. He was a captain of dragoons, who had fallen at the battle of Culloden, after having distinguished himself in circumstances of the greatest difficulty and danger. Godfrey had been named after this heroic great-uncle, who was an elder brother of grandfather ; and it was impossible to look at the portrait without remarking the extraordinary family likeness which existed between the good-looking young soldier, in the red coat, and powdered hair, and the last male descendant of his ancient house.

As in the younger Godfrey, the brow was low and broad, the powdered hair contrasting happily with the somewhat accentuated line of the dark eyebrows. The eyes were wakeful, honest, passionate, whilst a look of chivalrous daring, mingled with an emotional expression of tenderness about the lips, rendered the countenance peculiarly fascinating. Godfrey had always been very proud of this particular ancestor, and he felt for him much more affection than most children would have been capable of feeling for a mere piece of painted canvas. He was proud, too, of the pretty ladies in their low square-cut dresses of faded blue and dingy white, with their wonderful head-dresses, their pearl

necklaces, and their slender Vandyke hands; and he was glad to think that he came of a family which (as Erskine St. Clair was in the habit of affirming) had always been celebrated for the possession of 'beauty, bravery, and brains.'

Is pride of birth, I wonder, like so many other impressions which have been hitherto fostered and revered, only a sham and a delusion after all, or is there something really stimulating and ennobling in the contemplation, from afar, of virtue upon which we cannot reasonably plume ourselves, beauty not always hereditary, wisdom in which we have had no part, or of bravery often the result of mere accident, or due to that indifference to death and disaster engendered by the perils and uncertainties of 'troublous times?'

To Godfrey this contemplation seemed certainly to have been both stimulating and ennobling. These rows of departed St. Clairs, looking out at him from their gilded frames, were to him like friends and mentors; and he would have cowered before them in bitter humiliation, had he considered that any thought of his boyish heart was unworthy of so gallant an ancestry.

His living friends (for Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair behaved towards him more after the manner of *friends*, or acquaintances, than ordinary parents) had received him with kind and condescending approval. His mother had patiently submitted to his filial embrace, whilst his father had seemed really gratified at the progress he had made in his studies, and at the improvement which even so short a time had made in his appearance.

'The boy is growing extremely handsome,' he remarked, after Godfrey had quitted the room. 'The

likeness to my uncle, the hero of Culloden, is very remarkable.'

'It is indeed,' replied his wife; 'it strikes me as most extraordinary. We were quite right to call him "Godfrey."'

Mary Parker, too, received the boy with every kind expression of welcome. He had passed his Christmas holidays in London, whither his parents had repaired during the severest portion of the winter, so that it was quite a long time since she had seen him. She had no particular vocation now, her young charge having grown, as she said, 'too much of a man' for her; but she stayed on at Dallingridge all the same, mending the household linen and helping the other servants, inhabiting now an almost subterranean apartment below the level of the carriage-road, and looking out upon a grassy bank which rose up like the side of a dry moat and concealed the lower range of windows from view. Godfrey used to visit his former nurse by sliding down this bank, and slipping in at the window (a mode of entrance which was likewise perfectly well known to honest John McBean); for he had not yet been long enough at school to affect that contempt for all women-folk which is generally expressed by the British school-boy.

But there was yet another person with whom he very soon sought an opportunity of meeting—his little cousin Sophy, who received him literally with open arms. She began by thanking him very much for his double present. The tortoise, she said, was perfectly well and happy. 'Nelus' had bored a tiny hole in its shell, to which she had tied a piece of string, and it was now tethered out on the front lawn, opposite the

centre gable of the house. All the winter it had been just like a dead body, but with the fine weather it had returned to animation.

The New Testament she had not yet begun ; but she was going to read it quite carefully after she had finished *Gil Blas*, which had got on rather slowly in consequence of all the reading and writing she had had to do for her father during the short winter days, and now that he was becoming 'so near-sighted.'

'I have done something, though, which I know will please you,' she cried triumphantly. 'But I don't suppose you could guess what it is in a hundred years.'

Godfrey felt it would be useless to try to do what seemed so difficult.

'Do you give it up ?' asked little Sophy.

'Yes ; I give it up.'

'Well, then, *I have been to church!* However, I will begin and tell you from the beginning. One day, quite lately, when I was wandering along by the side of our river, that little stream that runs through the garden, beyond the place where the bridge is, who should I see but Janus ; she was walking along very fast, in her best gown, and hiding something under her shawl, pressed quite close to her. Altogether she looked as if she was going to do something wrong.'

'How do people look,' asked the boy, amused, 'when they are going to do something wrong ?'

'Oh, I don't know ! They walk fast, and look hot, and put on their best clothes and very new thick boots, which make a great deal of noise, and they look to the right and the left and behind and before—at any rate *she* looked like this. Father has always said that in secret she was an idolater ; and it turned out that she was going off to church on the sly.'

‘Well, I don’t see that there was anything wrong in that,’ said Godfrey, looking grave.

‘Oh, you are not one of *us*! But, at any rate, it was very wrong of me to go with her.’

‘And you *did*?’ exclaimed the boy, his countenance brightening.

‘Yes; I insisted. In vain she tried to drive me back. I ran along after her all the way to Poynings Church, making footmarks on the dusty road, just like the savages in *Robinson Crusoe*.’

‘And did she let you go to church like that, with no shoes and stockings?’

‘She would have stopped me if she could; for she asked me very often to go back, but I wouldn’t. Just before we got to the entrance of the town she picked up a flint and pretended she was going to throw it at me; but I only took up another, a much bigger and sharper one, and on I went. When I came into church you *should* have seen the faces of the Dean and all the people!’

‘I should think so, coming in like that, with your bare feet! Had you these dead leaves sticking in your hair, I wonder?’

‘Yes; I dare say I had; but let me go on. Patter, patter I went down the middle part of the church, which felt so cold and smooth after the prickly road; but what do you think I was walking on all the time? *Graves*—hundreds of graves! Nearly two thousand dead bodies, they say, are buried under Poynings Church—nearly all of them Hickathrifts. I read some of their names as I went along.’

‘One always heard that the Hickathrifts were a very ancient family,’ remarked Godfrey, and from his manner the little girl perceived that he took no exception to the two thousand dead bodies.

‘Well,’ she continued, ‘on and on I went, following Janus; and when I looked up from the graves, lo and behold, there were Sir Peckham, and Lady Hickathrift, and Tom, with his large nose—come home from Saturday till Monday—all looking at me in the greatest astonishment from a square place, like a little room, with red curtains and no ceiling.’

‘That is called a pew,’ explained the schoolboy. ‘I should think, indeed, that they *were* astonished!’

‘I would have said, “Good-morning, Tom; good-morning, Sir Peckham,” but they all looked so grave and solemn that I was afraid to speak. Then Janus sat down and covered up her face for a little while, and I saw she had on her new drab-cotton gloves; and I did the same, only I peeped out of one eye, through my fingers, and saw all the people just the same. In fact I did like she did in everything. When *she* stood up *I* stood up, and I sat down and knelt down and did all the things quite right. Really it’s all quite easy. There was a very odd smell in church, partly of poor people, and red baize, and old straw footstools, and stuffiness.’

‘Ah, it may be very easy to sit down and stand up at certain places,’ said the boy, severely. ‘But you might do this, and yet not know *why*, nor understand what was said. I should like to know whether you understood the prayers or the sermon?’

‘I ought to have understood them,’ answered Sophy, ‘for they said over the same thing a great many times, till I was quite tired of it; and the droning, and buzzing, and odd-smelling went on for some time, and the kneeling down and getting up again, and the standing, and then came the sermon.’

‘I do hope,’ said Godfrey, fervently, ‘that it was a

good one, and that it taught you something. I have heard my father say that the Dean is a little long-winded; but one oughtn't to mind the length.'

'Well, I could have preached a better sermon myself,' replied the little girl decidedly. 'I understood it all; but I saw Janus and all the poor people looking quite stupefied, and several of them went to sleep. Instead of giving them good advice, the Dean got up and talked the greatest nonsense you ever heard. Even Janus was obliged to own she didn't know what it was all about.'

'Perhaps,' said Godfrey, 'that you weren't either of you paying proper attention.'

'I know that *I* paid proper attention, for I can remember every word of it, and I have thought a great deal about it ever since. First of all, he said that he was "the Good Shepherd;" and then that he was "the true vine;" and then, I think, he said he was "a door;" and when he had said it once, he said it several times all over again.'

'He didn't mean *himself*,' explained Godfrey. 'Those were types.'

'So he told us. And next he said, "Now, what *is* a door?"' but before I had time to answer him, he went on and answered himself; and this was what he kept on doing all through, asking *us* questions, and then answering them himself in his own way, and sometimes quite wrongly. It was *so* provoking!'

'Sermons generally *are* preached in that way,' said Godfrey.

'Well, it's a way I don't think I could ever get to like. It puts one so much out of temper. He said that there were several kinds of doors, which, of course, we all knew. Some were big, he said, and some were

small ; some were so narrow that only one person could go through at once, and others were so enormous that a whole army could ride under them on horseback ; some opened with a latch, and some with a bolt, and some with a key, and some were always kept locked, so that no one could pass in ; and others were always left open, so that any one could go in who liked. That was like *his* door. It was always left open, and any one could go in, and yet they were so foolish that they wouldn't ! Then, when he had said this once, he said it all over again ; and then he began worrying "the Good Shepherd" and the "true vine," just in the way he had worried the door ; and then he said a great deal more that no human being could make "head or tail" of ; and then he covered his face with his hands, and seemed ashamed of all the nonsense he had been talking ; and then everybody did the same ; and then Sir Peckham and Lady Hickathrift and Tom came down from the little square room and walked out first, and Janus followed, only she *would* let nearly all the others pass out before her, from humbleness, which was a great disappointment to me, as I had something to say to Tom ; but when I got outside he was just going in at the Abbey gateway, and though he looked round, I couldn't make him see me. And then the whole thing was over, and I was very glad ; and Janus and I walked home, and had boiled beef for dinner and apple dumplings.'

Thus ended little Sophy's church-going for many a long year.

Nor was it altogether surprising that, to a child reared as she had been reared, a religious ceremony in an ill-ventilated country church, and conducted by a clerical dignitary possessed of very average powers of

eloquence, should present nothing either attractive or inspiring. She had gone to it impelled by no high-strung sentiment of reverential awe; for, being absolutely destitute of any inculcated spiritual predispositions, she could only look upon the whole service in the light of an entertainment, and as such, notwithstanding its novelty, it was disappointing. It is true that, whenever the fine old organ pealed forth, she experienced a sensation which was new to her; but her untutored mind failed to connect it with any divine yearning to hold communion with her Creator. To her it seemed merely a louder and more penetrating kind of music than any she had hitherto heard, and as such it surprised her somewhat awfully; but it was *only music*, and nothing more, just as the New Testament had seemed to her to be *only a book*, to be named—as she had named it—in the same breath as *Gil Blas*, and to be read and criticised in the same spirit as that in which she had read and criticised the autobiography of the Spanish adventurer, without knowing that to many such a proceeding would have seemed irreverent in the highest degree.

But Sophy's nature was by no means irreverent. 'According to her lights,' she revered and admired all that appeared to her worthy either of reverence or admiration: the wide, green-billowed ocean, the pink and golden sunsets, the ever-present spread of high heavens, dappled—as now, in the spring-time—with floating white clouds, blue and serene in the summer, flecked in autumn with wild 'mares' tails,' and rent with the voice of the tempest, or lowering in the dim days of winter with leaden menace of white snow-flakes. Further even than this had she strained her childish gaze, and her wandering fancy would often

glide through the little clefts and crevices in what seemed the lower and more penetrable firmament, in the vain and longing endeavour to catch some glimpse of that mysterious Beyond—the ‘happy hunting-grounds’ of the savage, the ‘*grand peut-être*’ of the sceptical philosopher.

‘My religion seems a great deal bigger than yours,’ she said, in reply to Godfrey’s reproachful comments upon her want of devotional feeling. ‘I don’t believe any church could shut it in.’

‘Ah, Sophy, that isn’t indeed a sign that it’s big. All religious people, in all parts of the world, go to church! In my geography——’

‘You are always talking about your geography!’ exclaimed the little girl impatiently.

‘And you are always talking about your religion.’

‘Yes, that is the difference between us,’ said Sophy sadly. ‘Religion is a great deal bigger than geography.’

‘Geography is the whole world!’ cried the boy earnestly.

‘Yes, but religion is this and every other world, and the sea, and the sky, and beyond the sky! Geography is all mapped and measured, and named; but *my* religion is not ruled down or planned out. It’s all over the place!’ and she waved her sunburnt arms in the direction of the distant horizon.

‘I suppose,’ said Godfrey, in a tone of patronage, ‘that it is your father, and all these odd people that stay with you, who fill your head with these curious ideas. If the fellows at school heard you talk, how astonished they would be!’

‘Perhaps *I* shouldn’t understand *them* either,’ answered Sophy. ‘But, indeed, my father leaves me

very much to myself. He's obliged to do so, having many other things to attend to besides me—things having to do with the good of the whole world. And as for the people who stay with us, though they are all very kind, they can't take much notice of me either—they are all so much taken up with the Great Cause.'

'And what is the Great Cause?'

'Oh, it's a very Great Cause indeed!' answered the little girl, with more hesitation than Godfrey was prepared to expect; 'though I am too young, father says, to understand it in all its bearings. It has something to do with Russia, and with the Turkish bath, and with the great Tartar Horde, and the battle between the Surs and the Assurs, and with wearing very little clothes. It's rather difficult to understand, but father says that events "revolve in cycles," and that the whole thing lies in a nutshell, and is as broad as it's long.'

'Indeed!' said the boy, drawing a long breath.

'It seems rather complicated.'

'Yes. Still I'm certain it's right, for all the people working for it are such wonderfully clever people, whilst every one else seems so dull and stupid. Nothing is new to them. They read of something, as a new thing, in the papers, and then they can't help laughing, for they've known about it for *years and years*, only *they never tell!* This happens over and over again.'

'I suppose we shall all hear of your father some day,' remarked Godfrey. 'He is certain to leave his mark on the age.'

'You will *never* hear of him!' exclaimed Sophy, with an air of triumph. 'That is just what he says is the best of it! He wouldn't be heard of for worlds,

for he says of himself that he's only a wire-puller, and that wire-pullers are never seen or heard. Have you ever been to a play?' she asked suddenly.

'No,' said Godfrey; 'but I went once to a circus at Poynings Fair.'

'So did I, and I have never been to a play either; but father says in a play there are several kinds of people who have to be brought together before it can go on at all. There are the people who sit in the seats and look on, and who don't know what's going to happen or come next. Then there are the actors, dressed up so smartly, as kings and queens, wearing crowns, or as generals or judges; but these, though they *do* look so grand, can't move about as they like, they're obliged to do as they're told, and to say particular things, or walk in a particular way. The people clap their hands when they do all this well, and hiss at them when they do it badly; yet, after all, father says, they are only puppets. But then there are the people who *write* the plays which are spoken; and the *prompters*, who whisper to the kings and queens, and tell them what they are to say; and the *scene-shifters* and the *carpenters*. *These* are never seen at all, and the people in the seats don't clap their hands at *them*; and yet they manage everything, and no play could go on without them. They're like father and his friends. Now do you understand?'

'Yes, I think I see what you mean. It seems all very wonderful.'

Whilst they were conversing upon these important subjects, they had crossed the fields at the back of the farm, and entered a long belt of woodland, towards the middle of which the property of Francis St. Clair joined that of Sir Peckham Hickathrift, the division

being marked by a long, low, black gate, upon the two posts of which were nailed the heads of several cats, along with the bodies of stoats, weasels, and other vermin which had been caught poaching

‘Look! there is the head of the Serene Highness!’ said Sophy, pointing to one of these ghastly objects. ‘He is fast becoming what I used to call a “skelicum” when I was very little. Open the gate quickly, I don’t like to look at him! You must lift it—like that—it generally sticks.’

Godfrey lifted the gate, and rearranged the chain with which it was fastened, and they entered together a low alder-wood adjoining part of the Poynings rookery.

‘Hush!’ cried Sophy suddenly, fancying that she distinguished voices above the noisy cawings of the rooks, that seemed somehow to be in a great state of turmoil and commotion.

‘Ah, I see what it is!’ she whispered at last, with grim satisfaction. ‘Now I’ve really caught them! It’s those horrid Stubberfield boys taking the poor rooks’ nests! Look! Jesse is climbing up the tree; and there is Enoch with a large nest in his hand!’

‘What ought we to do?’ asked Godfrey. ‘Are not they on their own ground?’

‘Yes; but Sir Peckham hates their doing it, Tom told me. It was Tom who first taught me to attack them. Moses Weller is on my side; don’t you see him there?—the second biggest boy. He’s my spy, and he’s only looking on to tell of them. Oh, how wicked they are! Let’s advance very quietly. Have you your stick?’

‘Yes,’ answered Godfrey, who was creeping along so as to make as little noise as possible.

The youthful rustics were standing only about fifty yards off, but the noisy cries of the disturbed rooks prevented them from hearing Sophy and Godfrey as they approached. One of them was in the act of sliding down the straight stem of a Scotch fir, at the foot of which his companions were anxiously awaiting him. They seemed to be lads of from twelve to fifteen years of age, and were all dressed in the drab smock-frocks, yellow spatterdashes, and catskin caps, which in this part of England form almost a national costume.

The boy Sophy had pointed out as her ally seemed to be demeaning himself strangely after the manner of an accomplice. He appeared deeply interested in the descent of Jesse Stubberfield from the fir-tree, even lending him a final 'back,' and gathering up his smockfrock like an apron, in order that he might receive a portion of the booty.

Sophy could scarcely believe the testimony of her own eyes, when she beheld a young rook, wide-mouthed, long-necked, and naked, hurled struggling into the lap of her partisan, but she generously hoped that he was only 'concealing his play' from diplomatic motives, and in order that he might establish a more certain proof of the enemy's guilt.

When the advancing party were within only some dozen paces of the birds'-nesters, Sophy gave the word for a charge, and uttering a loud 'war-cry,' she and her companion rushed headlong upon the astonished Stubberfields. Alas for the valour of the British chawbacon! Unexpectedly stalked and encompassed, though by a foe inferior to themselves both in age and numbers, the craven-hearted 'Stubberfieldiuses' took refuge at once in flight, without so much as striking a single blow. Had Sophy and Godfrey taken the

trouble to pursue them, hurling at them missiles of vengeance, none of their wounds would have been received in front. Moses remained behind, pulling his forelock, and looking rather uncomfortable, the accusing voice of the young rook sounding hoarsely from the folds of his gaberdine.

'How's this, Moses?' inquired Sophy sternly. 'You seemed to be helping the Stubberfields. We were watching you.'

Flushed with victory, she had seized upon him by the loose sleeve of his smock.

'It wur Jesse done for un,' muttered the rustic sulkily, pointing to the signs of carnage upon the ground.

'Well, but why did you let him? How could you stand by and see it done? Why didn't you come at once and fetch *me*?' inquired the 'Great Goddess of the Sophirian Empire.'

'Jesse, he done for un,' persisted the lad doggedly, evidently thinking that to establish his colleague's guilt would go some way towards whitewashing himself.

'How wicked of him!' cried Sophy. 'I don't think you would *do* anything I disliked so much, but still, *you looked on*.'

'He tuk un up, soa,' said Moses, illustrating the fact upon the young rook, which he now held in his hand.

'Oh, don't! you'll hurt it!' exclaimed the apprehensive Sophy, shuddering at his rough handling.

'He tuk un up, soa,' continued Moses Weller, not heeding her. 'An' Lard strike me dead, missy, if he didn't wring the neck of un soa!' Whereupon the ignorant boy wrung the neck of the poor young rook.

'Oh, oh!' gasped Sophy, looking as though she were about to faint.

‘What a horrible oath!’ said Godfrey, very much shocked. ‘God might *really* strike you dead some day.’

‘Ah, but He never does!’ sobbed the little girl. ‘Moses says it always before everything, so you mustn’t mind. Oh, the poor young rook! You horrid boy!’ she continued, scowling at him, anger having taken the place of sorrow. ‘How *could* you do anything so cruel?’

‘Strike me, if that warn’t just wot Jesse did for un!’ answered the chawbacon, too thickheaded to understand.

‘But don’t you see, you cruel creature! that you’ve just done the same thing yourself? Ah, these people are quite hopeless!’ she exclaimed, flinging herself passionately into Godfrey’s arms. ‘How *can* one ever teach them or make them do what they ought?’

‘Strike me, if Jesse didn’t throttle un!’ reiterated Moses; and having no living creature upon which to illustrate the fact, he commenced throttling a portion of his smockfrock.

‘Yes, and some day God *will* strike you dead, you bad boy! just as you did that poor toad the other day!’ said Sophy ominously, as she disengaged herself from Godfrey’s protecting arms. ‘You are always saying that, and then striking everything dead yourself.’

‘What did he do to the toad?’ asked Godfrey.

‘Oh, it was too dreadful! I saw him, the other day, hacking and smashing at something with a stone. He seemed quite angry, and kept on calling out to the poor innocent creature, “I’ll larn ye for being a toäd!”’

‘Well, he *wur* a toäd, wurn’t he?’ said the incorrigible Moses, with a knowing leer. ‘A middlin’-sized toäd.’

‘Oh, get out of my sight!’ exclaimed Sophy fiercely. ‘*Please go!* for if you stay, I’m afraid I shall dash you

off the face of the earth. You are yourself far horrider than twenty thousand toads! You're just like some dreadful Roman emperor; and I do wish, I'm sure, that you had only one head, so that I might strike it off.'

Moses Weller was very nearly replying that he *had* only one head, but as he did not feel quite sure that he might not have got *two*, neither of them very well stocked with brains, he was afraid of volunteering a statement, and so slouched off, with the gait peculiar to his species, without saying another word.

'They can't help walking like that,' said Sophy, looking after him. 'The shoemaker makes all their boots exactly the same size, after a certain age. There's the boy's size, and the man's size; and whilst you're a boy you must wear one, and when you're a man you must wear the other. Father says they're like the bed of Procrustes.'

'Boots or no boots,' said Godfrey, 'they all seem dreadfully ignorant. I wish one could improve them.'

'Yes, they're dreadful,' answered the little girl sadly. 'It isn't that they're *wicked*; it would be better if they were, for a wicked person might be got good, but they're *stupid*. Their brains are arranged wrong, and how *are* we to get at the insides of their heads? And the worst of it is that they think *they're* right, and that *we're* wrong! Oh! what can we do with them?'

'I believe,' said Godfrey thoughtfully, 'that if we were rid of all the stupid people, the bad ones might be got right with good teaching.'

'Yes, but if we began to get rid of them, we should be blamed and called cruel by the people who didn't know our reason. Which would you use to kill them with—poison or clams?'

‘Oh, I was only in fun, of course,’ answered the boy, smiling at her zeal. ‘You are a funny little girl, and I do believe that you would kill any one if you fancied it would do good to the rest of the world.’

‘Yes, that I certainly would!’ answered she earnestly, ‘and myself as well; but most people kill only to do harm.’

The youthful reformers, however, reached their respective homes that evening without either causing or deploring any further bloodshedding.

A very few days after the discomfiture of the Stubberfields, a revelation came to Godfrey which left a profound impression upon his youthful mind. Sophy and he had guessed, of course, by reason of their common surname, that they were in some manner related; but they could gather no particulars from their attendants, and they were both somewhat nervous about questioning any of the higher authorities.

It is true that Sophy had eased her conscience by mentioning to her father, at first, that she had ‘met a boy;’ but she had since abstained from alluding to any of her after-meetings with Godfrey from a feminine instinct which warned her that such meetings might possibly be forbidden her in the future. She had, indeed, repeatedly inquired of Janus who the boy really was who came from the ‘enemy’s country,’ and what manner of enemy it was who dwelt there, but the stolid serving-woman had only replied, as she generally *did* reply, ‘Little girls should be *seen*, and not heard;’ or, ‘You must go fur to ask your *par*;’ or, ‘I’ve other fish to fry, missy.’

One day, however, Sophy determined to take the bull by the horns, and inquire boldly of her father.

‘I have met that boy again, father,’ said she accord-

ingly; 'the boy that's called "Godfrey," who comes from the enemy's country, and who gave me my tortoise.'

'Have you?' answered her father carelessly. 'What makes him come our way?'

'I don't know,' said the little girl, 'but we like walking and playing together. What relation is he to us?'

'He is the son of my brother,' replied Francis St. Clair; 'at least, I believe he has a boy of that name.'

'I am very glad he is a relation,' said Sophy, 'for now I know I can see as much of him as I like. Before I wasn't quite sure.'

'I have no feeling whatever against that unfortunate boy,' rejoined the Philosopher, 'but I don't want to see his father; and my reason is that I believe him to have injured me. He is a man, however, whom I could never have endured, even if he had rendered me a service. If your seeing the son leads to my seeing the father, I would rather by far that he kept away.'

'A thrust from the spear of a brother smarts more than the smiting of a stranger,' remarked the Great Prophet, who was still making the home of his disciple his head-quarters; 'and yet blood is stronger than water.'

'It is; but the ties of blood ought not to blind one to the voices of truth and justice,' said Mr. St. Clair. 'Now, if a man who is not my brother wrongs me, insults me, bears false witness against me, what follows?'

'His blood becomes as water at your feet,' answered the Mystic; 'his bones will be made to whiten before the vengeance of Allah.'

'Exactly; and yet, if he happens, *most unfortunately*, to be my brother, I am to overlook all this, and fall upon his neck and embrace him. And why? Not from

any affection that I bear him, but simply because my contemptible self-love won't permit me to condemn as worthless any one who is nearly related to myself! It is absurd! I think I may say that I have done the only thing to be done—I have avoided my brother; I have borne him no ill-feeling, but I have simply avoided him. I said, years ago, "May his shadow never darken my door!" and it never has. Since then I have made my own life without him. I have no need of the society of a man I could neither like nor respect.'

'The battle between Sur and Assur,' remarked the Prophet, 'between Good and Evil, shall continue to all time; and now the victory shall be on the one side, now on the other.'

'To use a canting phrase,' continued Francis St. Clair, 'I see now that "it was all for the best;" and so, Sophy, my child, though I bear no malice to this poor boy, I don't want him to be, as it were, the thin end of the wedge; I don't want the rest of the lot coming and invading us here. You're an intelligent child, and so I don't think I need tell you not to mention anything I may have said about his father. It does no good, and don't put your two heads together, and fetch and carry and make mischief.'

'Oh, indeed we won't!' cried the little girl, glad to think that she and Godfrey might still be friends, even if they did not 'put their heads together.' 'Am I that sort of person?' and she spread out her hands appealingly.

'Well, no, I don't think you are,' said her father, smiling and pinching her cheek.

'I have a very romantic thing to tell you,' she said to Godfrey next time she encountered him in her rambles. 'Your father is the brother of my father; so

we're *very* near relations indeed—the next thing to brother and sister. They don't speak to each other, because they quarrelled, and it was *your* father's fault; but *my* father doesn't mind our playing together, only you're not to be the thin end of the wedge, and we're not to put our heads together, and fetch and carry and make mischief.'

'I should like to know a little more about the quarrel,' said Godfrey, guardedly. 'How do you know that it was all the fault of my father?'

'We might ask Mrs. Weller something about it,' suggested the little girl, looking in the direction of the shepherd's house, which, with its one thick middle chimney, lay nestling amongst the hop-cowls and straw-ricks of Great Stillingfleet. 'We might say something like this to her: "Don't you think we're very much alike for cousins, Mrs. Weller?" or we might say: "We mean to marry some day, Mrs. Weller, and make up the quarrel, and join the two properties." Don't you think that would be a good plan? Then she'd be sure to talk to us about it.'

'We'll go in, then,' said the boy, turning towards the cottage. 'How funny of you thinking about our ever marrying!'

'Yes; as if we ever should! But it's only a way of beginning. Come along.'

As they approached, however, the little girl detected, through the open door, the accents of the offending Moses, Mrs. Weller's youngest son, and she exclaimed nervously,—

'Oh, really, I don't think I can bear to look that Moses in the face after his behaviour! You must go in alone.'

Godfrey was very glad afterwards that he happened to go into the cottage without Sophy, though he felt

somewhat in need of her feminine tact when he found himself face to face with Mrs. Weller and her son Moses. He did not know exactly how to begin.

‘Come in for a drop of milk, my dear?’ asked the good woman, relieving him of his difficulty, whilst Moses, looking very much ashamed, hobbled off into the washhouse, where he remained clattering about upon the brick-floor during the remainder of Godfrey’s visit.

‘Yes, please, Mrs. Weller, I should like some milk; and may I take some out *to my cousin*, who is waiting outside?’ He said this in obedience to a sudden inspiration.

‘Dear, yes; but won’t the little lady come in?’ answered the shepherd’s wife, good-naturedly, as she proceeded to procure the new milk.

‘She’s had a quarrel with Moses,’ Godfrey explained, raising his voice so that he might be overheard by the malefactor in the washhouse. ‘He’s offended us both by taking birds’ nests. It’s very cruel.’

‘There, there; well it do please one, surely, fur to see you a-gooing about together as kinsfolk should,’ remarked Mrs. Weller, ignoring the allusion to her son. ‘We can’t goo fur to certify wot’s kep you all apart so long; and I’m sure, my dear, your par is so well beliked we don’t ought to goo fur to say anything against un, we don’t: but still, it do seem ill-natural-like fur two brothers to bear malice against one another, and live fur all the world like strangers. It be surprising, it be!’

Godfrey was listening with all his ears; but there was no need for him to put in a word, as Mrs. Weller went wandering on garrulously, after the manner of her kind.

‘Well, to be sure, Muster Frank, poor dear gentle-

man, they *do say* he be a little wrong in his top-story ;' and she began tapping her forehead significantly. 'And that, and his flyin' out in the feâce of his Almighty, and not holdin' to his Gospel Truth, it do hurt your dear par, it do ; and then fur him to go fur to marry a common tramp ! . . .'

"*A common tramp !*" Godfrey echoed, in consternation. This was indeed more than he had bargained for.

'Well, a gipsy-girl, a poor creatur as warn't dressed nur reared like a Christian. There be a plenty of such-like a-camping down by Poynings Bottom o' fair times. She come up one evenin' and arst fur a strip o' blanket, as it wur middlin' chilly, it wur. I set the dawgs to watch her whilst I went up to fetch un ; fur, bless your heart, one can't trust such customers noways. They meäkes off with whatever they can lay their hands on. I never could see, nohow, as she was such a mighty beauty as we'd heerd tell. . . .'

'She was thought very pretty, then ?'

'Bless my soul, yes ! An' when she was took poorly a little time afterwards, an' we made up a bed fur her in the old barn, down comes Muster Locke, as is land-steward over at Poynings Abbey, to see as how she wur a-wantin' fur nothin' ; and her ladyship a-sendin' over jellies and medicine-bottles ; and then up comes Muster Frank and teäkes and marries her off-hand, and all because she wur such an almighty beauty, which neither me nor my Jerry couldn't never see nothing surprisin' in, fur all we heerd say of her.'

'But was she a real live gipsy ?' asked Godfrey, grasping, as it were, at a straw, 'or only a lady who liked living in a tent ?'

'*A lady!*' cried Mrs. Weller, contemptuously. 'Bless your dear heart! she was like the rest of them gentlefolks as goo travelling about in a caravan all over brooms and kittle-holders! Why, her par took and mended that 'ere chair, he did, and soldered the bottom of that 'ere old black biler; an' well he done both o' them, that I *will* goo fur to say—well, he done 'em!'

'Ah!' said Godfrey, drawing a long breath, as he passed out of the cottage, 'I see it all, now.'

It was a consolation, at any rate, to think that with regard to the family quarrel *his* own parents were not, after all, so very much in the wrong!

Little Sophy was waiting for him some few paces from the cottage upon the opposite side of the road. She was crouching under the bank, protected from the wind by the privet-hedge which rose at her back, and separated the properties of the unnatural brothers. It seemed a snug and comfortable resting-place, and, very likely, it was not far from here that her tinkering maternal grandfather had taken up his position whilst mending Mrs. Weller's chair, or soldering the bottom of her old black boiler. The long bare legs of the youthful savage, burnt with the suns of some ten summers, scratched with the blackberry-bushes of the same number of autumns, and chilled by the biting frosts of winter, were gathered up so that her chin rested upon her knees; her weird arms encircled her shaggy head, which, with its wonderful eyes, peeped out at the young heir of Dallingridge as he advanced somewhat sadly towards her.

'I see it all now,' he repeated to himself, 'and that's why she's so odd-looking, and talks such non-

sense.' And, boy that he was, he could not help feeling conscious of a certain change in his feelings towards his newly-discovered cousin.

'Poor little thing!' he thought, notwithstanding this consciousness of superiority. 'She's a dear little thing, after all; and it would break her heart to tell her that her father's a madman, and that her mother was a common tramp: for she thinks that he's the cleverest person in the world, and that *she* was a queen. I won't tell her.'

'Well, how about the feud?' asked Sophy archly. 'Are we not cousins; and wasn't it *your* father who was in the wrong?'

'We are certainly cousins,' answered Godfrey, a little gloomily, 'for our fathers are brothers. As for the quarrel, I fancy there must have been faults on both sides.'

'Then why don't you seem glad to think that we are such near relations?' asked the little girl, noticing his changed manner, and looking as though about to cry.

'Oh, don't! don't!' said Godfrey, taking hold of her little sunburnt hand consolingly, 'you poor, dear little thing!'

'When you say "poor" I know that you mean that you look down on me,' sobbed Sophy. 'Because when father talks about *you* he always calls you "that poor boy." I don't want to be pitied by you, I want to be *liked*. I want you to be glad to be my cousin, and you seem sorry.'

'Well, I *am* glad,' said Godfrey, kindly, as he kissed her wet eyes.

The discovery had, indeed, brought with it several grains of real comfort. He imagined now that he

knew the true reason for his parents' strange reticence on the subject of his eccentric relatives, whose society it was but natural they should consider undesirable. Yet, whilst he applauded their wisdom, he could not help feeling wounded at the idea that he had not been treated with more confidence and frankness.

'Surely,' he thought, 'papa and mamma might have told me all about it. They might have trusted me to think that they were in the right, when of course they were!'

And, as all concealment was odious to him, he waited for an occasion when he might inform Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair that he had discovered the mystery himself. No such occasion presented itself, however, until the very day of his departure for Eton—for he had finished his private schooling. Just as the carriage drove up to the door to convey him to the George Inn at Poynings, where he was to meet the London coach, Mrs. St. Clair afforded him the desired opportunity.

'By-the-by, whilst I think of it,' said she, 'where is your tortoise? Papa and I fancied that you had taken it with you to school, but we find you haven't brought it back with you. Is it dead?'

'I have given it away, mamma,' hazarded Godfrey, as he sprang lightly into the carriage.

'*Given it away!*' repeated both parents in a breath. 'And, pray, to whom did you give our present?'

'I gave it to my cousin Sophy,' said the schoolboy, boldly; and at this moment the carriage drove off, leaving Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair looking (as Mary Parker afterwards remarked to John McBean) 'for all the world as if one might have knocked them down with a feather.'

As the carriage, passing along the high-road to Poynings, neared the confines of the 'Great Sophirian Empire,' Godfrey perceived Sophy, whom he had informed of the hour of his departure, perched upon the top bar of the entrance-gate.

'Good-bye, cousin Godfrey!' she called out to him, waving her bare sunburnt arms, as the great yellow carriage went lumbering past. 'I hope you'll like Eton. Give my love to Tom Hickathrift, and try and come back soon, before we turn into great, grand, grown-up people.'

'Good-bye, cousin Sophy!' cried Godfrey, leaning out of the carriage-window, until a turn in the road hid from his gaze the weird figure of the little girl.

And now the time has come when I must ask the reader also to say 'good-bye' to the 'cousin Sophy' of those early days; to the strange elfin little creature with the bare feet, the tangled mane, and the wonderful eyes peering out from her pensive child-face. The Godfrey St. Clair of this time must also pass away; for it will not be necessary to follow the active good-looking schoolboy, contemptuous of greatcoat and comforter, to the small cupboard in which he was lodged at his 'tutor's' or his 'dame's,' or to relate how he 'wet-bobbed' on the river, 'dry-bobbed in the playing-fields, or played at fives under the shadow of the gray chapel-wall which most Etonians will remember so well. It is as man and woman that I propose to follow them in future through those 'dark and sunlit pathways' in which they were destined to tread. Yet, as our after-actions are often only the natural results of the boy or girl training; and as the child is, incontestably, the 'father to the man,' it may not have been

altogether out of place to have set down here superficially some of their experiences in the morning of life, and to describe a few of the exceptional circumstances by which they were surrounded.

Let the reader imagine, however, that this morning-time is overpassed. 'Good-bye, cousin Sophy!' 'Good-bye, cousin Godfrey!' When next we meet you, you will be both turned into 'great, grand, grown-up people.'

BOOK THE FIRST.

‘The primrose path of dalliance.’—*Hamlet*, Act i. Scene 3.

CHAPTER I.

SEVEN years have passed away. To some people—and to some people’s lives—these years have brought with them but little in the way of change; twining no garlands, either of bay, orange-blossom, or cypress; blanching no ringlet, and tracing not one furrow the more. Measured by summers in London, autumns by seashore or moorland, and winters passed merrily in the shires, these ‘swift-footed years’ have seemed only like so many months to the men and women of the great world who are in the habit of greeting one another, even after much longer lapses of time, as though they had met but yesterday. No one, however, could thus have met and recognised Sophy St. Clair without experiencing a sensation of surprise, these few years having transformed the strange-looking little woodland savage into a really beautiful woman.

She was now only seventeen, and therefore scarcely to be accounted a woman in our northern clime; but it was easy to perceive that her beauty was not of a kind to diminish as she advanced towards maturity. There was no trace now of the savage in her outward demeanour. She seemed, indeed, at first sight to be almost as civilised and accomplished as any other young lady of her age. But though she went no longer bare-footed and half-naked, though her dark curling hair

was now gathered up and wound in a thick coil round her head, and though she had acquired a habit of courting repose in a conventional bed instead of upon rugs and door-mats, she was but very little changed in reality. The fact was, that her intelligence, having been matured so early, was hardly capable of further development, excepting such as it might seem to gain by experience and the frequenting of what is often wrongly termed 'good society.' Thus it was that the old-fashioned philosophical child had grown up into a childlike and ingenuous woman; so childlike and innocent, indeed, to all outward appearance, that it was difficult for those who had known her before to understand how it happened that she had not advanced with broader strides towards worldly wisdom, whilst there were some people even uncharitable enough to suspect that she only enacted the character of the child of Nature for reasons of her own, and that, moreover, she somewhat overdid the part. But the bare-footed little Pantheist was not dead. She had turned into a beautiful wood-nymph, that was all; and whether she found herself amongst the green boughs of her sylvan home, or surrounded by the crowded habitations of men, she differed only externally from the ragged sunburnt little Sophy who, seven years ago, had perched, barelegged and unkempt, upon the top bar of the Stillingfleet gate.

Her father had watched—as long as a waning daylight had permitted him to watch—this change in his daughter's personal appearance, which to him seemed almost alarming. But the moment at length arrived when he had to hear of her growing charms from the lips of others; for his eyesight, which had been gradually failing for several years, had now

almost entirely deserted him ; and save for a dim gray square of paler darkness, which told him where he had once seen the window, he was, to all intents and purposes, a blind man.

For this, the most cruel of all painless maladies, he had tried many ineffectual remedies ; and having commenced by consulting nearly all the physicians and oculists of his native land, he had been eventually handed over, as hopeless, to the tender mercies of several enterprising professors and quacks on the Continent, and in this way Sophy had seen a good deal of life. She had been with her father for several weeks near the 'castled crag of Drachenfels,' whilst he was consulting a celebrated German oculist : she had also travelled in Switzerland and Italy, visiting the large towns, and remaining on the way some time in Paris, and at most of these places her father had provided for her instructors in music, drawing, and languages, so that, contrary to the habit of most 'rolling stones,' she had acquired a very fair coating of moss in the form of education ; and as, added to this, she found herself daily in close communion and companionship with a man of refined manners and intellectual tastes, it was not, perhaps, surprising that at first sight she should appear to be quite as well informed as most of her more conventional neighbours.

But it is not the mere fact of seeing the world—by passing over its outward crust—that really educates and develops the perceptions of a woman. Ere she can become practically wise and experienced, she must be made to *feel* as well as to think ; she must lose, in her contact with other men and women, many of her own prejudices, and even of her good qualities : in a word, she must, to a certain extent, become forgetful of her

own individuality whilst mingling with the varied entities of the crowd. Sophy, however, had had very little chance of acquiring this particular form of wisdom; her father, who had been at all times a recluse, became doubly mistrustful of strangers, now that his blindness prevented him from beholding their faces, and judging, by certain frontal and facial angles, of their possible moral tendencies, so that he and his daughter mixed but seldom in general society. Returned to England, they had remained for some time in London, where—as a drowning man clings to a straw—Francis St. Clair had pretended to hope good things alternately of mesmerism, electricity, and even of the prophetic biological ink-spot, with its premonitory sweeping broom. Nay, he had furthermore condescended to consult the crystal globe of witch and wizard, and to assist at the nocturnal incantations of the necromancer, who, for his benefit, had chalked out the mysterious magic-circle, said to be generally approached, in the first instance, and previous to a fuller and more complete manifestation, by a foot of enormous proportions—a sight which is often to be beheld without the co-operation of geomancy.

He had also sent a lock of his hair to a sprightly and intelligent French lady, a Mademoiselle de Cramponaye, who had thereupon written him a prescription, and whom he had afterwards visited at her residence on the 'other side' of Oxford Street, where, a younger sister having performed over her some mesmeric passes, she became clairvoyante, and in her turn mesmerised the blind man, though it was permissible during the *séance* to converse upon subjects less mysterious. It was not at all displeasing to Francis St. Clair to feel the light touch of the fair unseen, or to listen to her

lively and amusing conversation; besides which, these visits helped to make the time go, which must often have seemed long to one who had seldom, before his affliction, remained for many moments unoccupied. But they made the money go too, and as he continued sightless notwithstanding, he had at last become resigned, and accepted his position as a blind man without a murmur.

Sophy had generally been present upon these occasions; and though she had experienced at first a natural feeling of awe at the idea of approaching such mysteries, she had somehow always come away more impressed with the vulgarity of the mediums and their surroundings than with any of the manifestations she beheld.

Still, these people afforded her father society and distraction, bereft as he now was of many of the simple pleasures to which he had been accustomed; and with some of them a friendly intercourse was continued after he had ceased to consult them professionally, Mademoiselle de Cramponaye, amongst others, having already visited Little Stillingfleet, accompanied by her sister Adèle, with whom Sophy had struck up quite a friendship.

Mr. and Miss St. Clair had also fallen in, at an occult *séance*, with a former acquaintance, the Rev. Josiah Carver, who, under a new name—assumed, as he stated, on account of an accession of property—was apparently engaged in the practice or investigation of arts almost as black as his skin, having ceased to associate himself with the fortunes of the ‘Sacerdotal Remnants.’

What had become of these unfortunate young men it was impossible to conjecture; for, at an accidental

mention of their names, an expression of such evident pain and displeasure passed over Mr. Carver's face, that Sophy, with feminine tact, had hastily pinched her father's arm and turned the conversation, fearing that they were now either reposing in an early tomb, or had behaved with base ingratitude to their former benefactor; for only in this manner could she account for the cloud which doubly darkened Mr. Carver's dark brow.

'Our Carver is evidently an irretrievable scoundrel,' Francis St. Clair had remarked to his daughter, when the *séance* was over. 'Poor fellow!' he added benevolently, feeling for him the same compassion as for a person bodily afflicted, 'he is really a highly intelligent man.'

'I never *could* like him,' Sophy answered, shuddering; 'and I don't think it can be only because he is *black*, for of course he can't help what he's like, any more than I can myself.'

'I wonder what my "*fair Sophia*" is like?' murmured the blind man tenderly. 'Come here; I should like you to tell me.'

'Don't call me your "*fair Sophia*,"' replied his daughter, going towards him. 'It sounds such a mockery, for I am dark and smudgy-looking.' And she sat down upon the floor at his feet.

'Ah, my child, I can't see you!' murmured he, in a disappointed voice; 'but you *feel* pretty. Tell me what you are like? Be honest and speak the truth. Are you like *her*?'

'I don't know; but you shall have the best description of myself that I can give you—the wheat with the tares, and the sheep and the goats together; nothing will I extenuate nor set down aught in malice. I'll

begin with my good points. First of all, I really do think I've got rather nice eyes.'

'Ah!' sighed her father, looking interested, 'I thought so.'

'If they were only *blue*,' she continued, 'I should be quite contented; but they are, unfortunately, *brown*. However, they're quite good enough for me, and a great many people have admired them. The best part of them are their eyelashes, as I have quite as many on the lower lid as at the top. Tom Hickathrift says he never saw such a thing in his life. There, you can feel, they're quite fuzzy, like spikes.' And she passed the thin hand of the blind man over her eyelashes.

'Tom is right,' said he, sadly; 'it is very uncommon. *She* had it, though. Tom is one of the finest fellows I have ever known.'

'Yes, dear, if one was *blind*,' Sophy remarked, archly; 'for he has indeed a most kind and generous soul. Ah! I forgot. Forgive me! I know you don't believe that he has one! . . .'

'No, dear, don't say that! How *can* we tell? If ever you feel that it is possible, and reconcilable with reason, that there should be an after-life, don't be afraid of telling me your impressions. Women have often strange powers of intuition, and it is not altogether a disagreeable thought, in spite of the rival allurements of Nirvana, as one finds oneself advancing in years. But now go on with your description. Tell me about your mouth.' And it seemed as if he was turning the force of some keener vision than that of which he could now boast, back upon the past.

'My mouth is smallish,' Sophy proceeded candidly; 'that I certainly can't deny. My upper lip curls up a little too much, I'm afraid; but I'm thankful to say

my teeth are very even and white. This is all there is in my face, for over my nose I must draw a veil, as it does not belong to any family.'

Sophy was very fond of reproaching her nose with belonging to no then known or classified family of noses; and, indeed, it may have been rather difficult to describe, for it seemed, somehow, to be Roman in profile, Greek in full-face, and in certain positions 'tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower.'

Since these days, however, *Middlemarch* has been written, and George Eliot has created and designated a new species of nose, which was till now homeless and unrecognised—namely, the nose with the 'little ripple' in it; and it was to this family that the nose of Sophy appertained.

'My hair is very long, as you know,' she went on, 'and dreadfully difficult to keep in order. It's all of different shades, which has an absurd effect by daylight; but at night, I'm happy to say, it looks black. I'm rather tall for a woman, as you can feel; and the nicest things about me are the things that are like you.'

'Ah, no; don't say that!' interrupted her father; 'you speak without knowing.'

'Well, I like best in myself what I like best in you, for to me you seem quite beautiful; and I've no doubt, when those foolish eyes come back—as of course they *will*—which have gone wandering off somewhere, you will see things you think pretty in *me*. All I can say is, that I don't admire *myself*, for I think women should be fair, like roses and lilies; but men should be like you—dark and fierce-looking, and yet with your dearest of dear faces!'

Having twisted herself with a sudden movement upon her father's knee, she continued, as she stroked

his hair with her tender fingers, 'At any rate, I'm quite good-looking enough to please myself, and I'm glad, of course, that I'm not positively ugly. Whenever I feel angry with my face, I think of people who are worse off than I am—the halt, the lame, and the blind—and I then feel much happier and more contented.'

'I'm glad you think of the blind,' said her father, smiling; 'and that the thought makes you happier: one always likes one's shortcomings to please some one!'

Sophy and her father made a very touching picture as their heads lay thus, close together, against the dark back of the arm-chair. Francis St. Clair was still, to all appearance, a young man, although he was not far from fifty. The resemblance between himself and his daughter was not now so striking as it had been in Sophy's childhood, when she might have been taken for the daughter of an Arab Sheikh, and he might well have passed for some such father. Now, however, she had about her more of the Hebe than of the child of the desert; whilst her father, his features having become further accentuated, his figure leaner, and his dark eyes, which, to a casual observer, did not appear to be without sight, hollower and less hopeful, looked more than ever like a chieftain of tented Bedouins, reduced, through adverse circumstances, to bear the ignominy of dwelling amongst the Giaours, and imitating, with certain notable modifications, their manners and customs.

Notwithstanding his affliction, he was as much occupied as ever with the furtherance of the Great Cause; nay, it even seemed as though his enthusiasm had increased with his blindness, and that this subject alone now furnished him with materials for

castle-building, and for the indulgence in certain fetishisms, inherent in all imaginative natures, but which, owing to his spiritual scepticism, had taken, in his case, a purely political form. Sophy, on the contrary, was beginning, at about this period, to develop sundry uncomfortable suspicions relative to the mysterious scheme, and there were even moments when she found herself actually doubting the infallibility of the Great Prophet.

‘I see,’ she remarked one morning, as she looked up from a packet of letters, for she was now employed both as reader and secretary to the blind man, ‘that when the Prophet had his last audience of the Pope, he arrived at the Vatican in a carriage drawn by four horses, and with two postilions. As all these horses and postilions come, in a kind of a way, out of our pockets, do you really think he required quite so many? . . . The Pope mightn’t have seen him drive up to the door. Can’t one go and see a Pope in a fly?’ she inquired humbly.

‘I think he was right,’ answered the Disciple more loyal than Peter. ‘I think the four horses and the postilions were imperatively necessary in order to maintain the dignity of the Cause, more particularly when he was visiting a Pontiff whose prestige results in a great measure from theatrical display. It is essential for the furtherance of our scheme, just now, that we should affect to coquette with Rome; and we must do so, as it were, in rouge and patches. Indeed, I don’t see, my dear Sophy, how, with the best of motives, he could have done otherwise. In fact,’ he added, lashing himself into a state of ardent enthusiasm, ‘he *dared not act differently* for the sake of a few miserable lire! The eyes of the whole of Christendom were upon him, and

it was very important that he should do nothing which could degrade his august mission. Had he done so, how could he ever have looked us in the face afterwards ?'

To this question his daughter made no reply. There was, in fact, nothing more to be said.

Although at this time Sophy's most fervent prayer—unuttered, perhaps, but ever present in the heart—was, that her father's sight might be restored to him, she could not help experiencing a sense of relief when it was at length decided that they should return to their peaceful country home.

For to her Little Stillingfleet was what Dallingridge had been to the boy Godfrey in the old days—a terrestrial paradise, endeared by a thousand memories. The wide stretch of sloping lawn on one side of the house, with its long shadows at eventide; the distant belt of dark fir-trees shutting off the pink and amber of the sunset; the less sombre woodlands of Great Stillingfleet, with their softer outlines, glowing now, in the autumn, as with smouldering russet fires,—all these, with the faint streak of blue sea bounding the horizon on the other side, beyond the smiling landscape, mapped out with its farms, its spires, its squares of plough and pasture, defined by the lines of the darker hedgerows, had seemed always to greet her on her return to them with varied voices of genuine welcome.

She was not, however, destined, just yet, to enjoy these delights alone with her father, as she would have desired.

'We are soon going back again to Little Stick-in-the-mud,' Mr. St. Clair remarked, one afternoon, to Mademoiselle de Cramponaye, as she was performing her mesmeric passes in front of his sightless eyes.

‘And if you and the fair Adèle should ever require a change of air, I hope you will not disdain to pay us a visit.’

The ‘magnetic lady’ paused for a few moments, during which she must have rejoiced that her handsome patient was unable to observe her emotion, but she replied presently in a composed voice,—

‘Adèle and myself will have much pleasure in profiting by your amiable invitation.’

The period fixed for the visit was about a week after the proposed return to ‘Little Stick-in-the mud’—a name invented by the blind man upon the spur of the moment; for, as well as in ‘quotations,’ he dealt in a kind of mild and innocuous species of facetiousness, which, by reason of its very mildness, was at times positively pathetic.

Sophy could not restrain a sensation of disappointment when her father said to her, on his return from the *clairvoyante*, whither he had gone, for a wonder, accompanied only by a servant,—

‘I have invited *la belle* Cramponaye to stay with us again, and she has accepted. She and her sister will come to us in about a week.’

‘She is not particularly “*belle*,”’ answered Sophy, feeling somewhat annoyed. ‘Adèle is much the prettier of the two.’

‘She seems, indeed, a most amiable young creature, and she may be of service to you in helping you on with your French; to converse with her a little every day will advance you.’

‘Yes,’ answered Sophy, touched at his solicitude for her welfare. ‘I *know* it thoroughly, but it will do no harm to rub up my accent; besides, I really am fond of Adèle.’

‘Her sister is, of course, the cleverer woman. I have seldom met a more thoroughly agreeable and enlightened person. Frenchwomen have, too (or *had*, when I last had the pleasure of beholding them), an extraordinary knack of putting on their clothes; now, as it is, unfortunately, the rule in this country, to protect one’s body by raiment from the salutary action of the outer air, which is, in itself, as any chemist will inform you, a life-giver, as well through its effect upon the human epidermis as upon . . .’

‘Why, you dear, foolish thing!’ exclaimed Sophy, with assumed anger, ‘what have you been worrying your old head about now? Surely you haven’t been thinking that I wish to deck myself out in smart dresses like some of the silly people we see here in London?’

‘No, dear; it isn’t so much your actual *dresses*, but there are many other little things which might help to make you look well. Mdlle. de Cramponaye has noticed that, notwithstanding your beauty, you have not yet mastered several of the smaller details of dress, which, so long as they are worn at all, may as well, as she remarks, be of the proper quality . . .’

‘What! gloves, boots, and shoes, and things of that sort?’ asked Sophy ingenuously. ‘Oh, I’ve got plenty of those; and Janus is going to make me some new white petticoats with frills; I am to buy the stuff for them.’

‘But why shouldn’t you get them already made?’ said her father, as with a sudden inspiration. ‘Prettier ones than any that could emanate from the clouded imagination of Jane! I think Mdlle. de Cramponaye would like to help you to make a few purchases. . . . Here is a cheque for thirty pounds, which I signed in

her presence—in fact, she was good enough to guide my hand—for I should like you,’ he added proudly, ‘to hold your own.’

‘O you old darling!’ exclaimed Sophy tearfully, for she knew how much it must have cost him to tear himself thus from the contemplation of his scheme for the regeneration of Europe, in order that he might busy himself with the construction of her under-garments. ‘Imagine my buying thirty pounds’ worth of frilled petticoats!’

‘Not only petticoats, my child; there are many other articles of modern female attire which you might buy—things of which I know nothing,’ said the Agnostic, with a sigh.

‘When we become rich,’ answered his daughter, firmly, ‘it will be plenty of time to think of all these things. At present we have quite enough to do with our money. First of all, we must make you see. Why should I wear expensive clothes only for my own selfish gratification? Who is to see all these beautiful new boots, and gloves, and frilled petticoats? And then, when you are well, there is the Great Cause . . .’

‘It is true,’ replied Francis St. Clair, in a gloomy voice; ‘too true! Hitherto I seem to have been squandering money upon myself alone! I have been behaving like an old brute . . .’

‘You have been behaving like an old darling!’ said Sophy, interrupting him with a kiss. ‘Only you seem suddenly to have become half an idiot! You know that we are not very rich, and I’m sure I must cost you a great deal. I have a very good appetite, and lately I have been taking lessons in so many different things. Then, besides me, there are Janus and Nelus and their children, who seem always to be picking up scraps in

the kitchen; and there are the cart-horses, Billy and Dragon, and the other horses; and the Great Cause, as I said before . . .’

‘All these things seem, somehow, to have cost nothing,’ said the ‘Wire-puller,’ earnestly. ‘Though *I*, too, had fancied that travelling, doctoring, dressing ourselves becomingly, and learning wisdom, might have made havoc with our fortune. I even thought that La Cramponaye . . .’

‘Well, yes,’ Sophy cut in somewhat eagerly; ‘a guinea a visit *is* a good deal when you have to go to her so often! Not that one would begrudge it if it had done you any good.’

‘She has been useful to me in many other ways,’ said the blind man. ‘After what you said to me some days ago about our expenses, I mentioned, as a reason for discontinuing my sojourn in town, that I feared I might be spending too much upon my own selfish pleasures (for it has really amused me to consult her); and I also told her that for many years indolence, increasing blindness, and the numerous important subjects with which I have been occupied, had prevented me from looking into my accounts. She very kindly went through them yesterday. She is a wonderful woman of business . . .’

‘Oh, couldn’t *I* have done it?’ asked Sophy, with a cry as of a wounded spirit.

‘Yes, my child, of course you could, perfectly; but you had frightened me a little lately. You had led me to suppose that we were half ruined . . .’

‘And you didn’t want me to know of it, if we were? Oh, I see! . . . Really, you are almost too good for this world!’ exclaimed Sophy, the cloud clearing from her brow, and the tears coming to her dark eyes.

‘Well, and now,’ continued her father, ‘what do you think? It all seems “passing strange” . . .’

‘I can’t think! Are we to be beggars; and will you have to carry a hat, like that rival blind man we so often meet, whilst I lead you about with a string?’

‘Not a bit of it,’ answered Francis St. Clair, looking rather ashamed. ‘You must know that I never thought of being miserly, and yet, of course, I appeared so to others (not that one cares much for the opinion of the herd), vegetating in the simple way I did, with so few servants. Then, again, as you know, I’ve positively nothing to keep up,—living, as we do, in a mere rat-hole,—I can’t hunt; I preserve no game, and yet plenty comes to us from both sides; we don’t entertain much, or go out; and I suppose this is how it has all come to pass . . .’

‘*What* has come to pass?’ inquired Sophy, anxiously. ‘You speak as though we had met with some misfortune.’

‘It is a misfortune which many people would willingly share with us,’ answered her father, smiling sadly. ‘The fact is, I am very much richer than I thought I was. I, in my stupid way, have been going on living on about five hundred a-year—from hand to mouth, as it were; requiring, as you know, very little. What was good enough for *us* seemed always good enough for our friends; and so, with an income of over two thousand a-year, and little extras always tumbling in—what do you think?’

‘I really can’t say anything, except that I always fancied we weren’t rich.’

‘Well, living on like this for more than fifteen years, and having spent very little before that, I now find that I have saved a good round sum, quite a fortune, in fact, and that without ever dreaming of it.’

‘Really!’ exclaimed Sophy, unable to conceal her astonishment. ‘I knew, of course, that we weren’t extravagant in the way that some people are, that we hated luxuries, avoided amusements, ate hardly any meat, drank no wine, and wore as little clothes as we possibly could; but I remembered that we were conspirators, “wire-pullers.” I fancied that “*scene-shifting*” and “*prompting*,” and whispering instructions to the “painted puppets” (particularly when we can’t arrive at them without a *carriage-and-four, with postilions*), must have cost something; and I recollected, too, that we were always in the clouds, and that we didn’t see the path under our feet, even when we had eyes: and all this made me fancy that we were probably poor, or that, if we weren’t, we should very likely become so some day.’

‘I, too,’ said Mr. St. Clair, ‘had some such thoughts at odd moments, so that my wealth has really come upon me quite by surprise. When Mademoiselle de Cramponaye explained to me the flourishing state of my exchequer, I could hardly believe that I was not under the influence of some magnetic slumber . . .’

‘Perhaps you *were*,’ interrupted his daughter, quickly. ‘Perhaps you dreamt all this about our enormous riches, and that it isn’t true!’

‘It is, though, indeed. We went over the whole thing together, what the property was worth, and what our expenses were: and she even inquired into my possible inheritance of Dallingridge, should any misfortune happen to the son of my miserable brother. I told her that it was entailed upon me; that I could raise money on this possibility, though it was, of course, very remote; and that the place could not be sold without my consent at present. She went into every detail

most good-naturedly, and proved to me incontestably that we are rolling in riches.'

'One thing is,' remarked Sophy, with a little sigh of resignation, 'it will soon go! It will go to the Turks, and the Poles, and the Circassians, and upon all the "rouge and patches" necessary to the "coquetting" of the Great Prophet. It will melt away like snow before the sun!'

'No, my child, *it shall not!*' cried the blind man, with sudden energy. 'It shall go on rolling and rolling up for you, until, some day, you will become quite a small heiress, powerful to help the worthy and deserving, whoever they may be.'

'Oh, I don't want you to keep it for me!' said Sophy, looking distressed. 'Please give it all to the Great Cause, for I dare say I should only throw it away upon something quite as useless.'

And, ashamed of her own temerity—which might appear, she fancied, almost like ingratitude at such a moment—she buried her face in the 'lists' of the paternal beard, which 'youth gone out' had not yet left completely 'in ashes,' notwithstanding that it might have vied, in other respects, even with the beard of Merlin, as described by the Laureate.

CHAPTER II.

FROM Sophy's words in the last chapter it will be apparent to the reader that, during the course of these seven years, she had lost a considerable amount of the veneration with which she had at one time regarded the Great Cause and all that appertained to it. And,

indeed, a very disagreeable sensation, which she would have given worlds to stifle and trample in the dust, had lately oppressed her. This took the form of a suspicion, of the basest and most unfilial kind—so it seemed to her—for it had caused her to ask herself more than once whether her father, upon some subjects so sceptical and inquiring, was not, with regard to many others, very little better than a dupe—malleable as clay in the hands of the potter, and even seeming, at times, to aid and abet in the throwing of dust in his own eyes.

She realised, notwithstanding her youth and consequent inexperience, that, by reason of this very scepticism, a large mass of credulity in his nature was left, as it were, free and unemployed; and that this, when requiring sustenance, was ready to fasten upon whatever seemed palatable at the moment, provided only that any such food had not been cooked in the oven of orthodoxy, or shaped in what he was wont to style contemptuously the ‘jelly-moulds of form and doctrine.’

Nay, had not she herself her ‘faiths and fetichisms,’ as she called them, entirely independent of theology, and was there not in her nature a craving almost as intense for the Ideal, the Marvellous, and the Romantic, as there was for the Good, the Beautiful, and the True?

Whilst she was yet a child, the irreconcilable contradictions and vaguenesses with which the Great Cause seemed to be fraught and environed, had not in the least astonished her; for she had said to herself that, with time, all that was then mysterious would clear away, and that the grand design for the political regeneration of mankind would lie before her, nobly transparent, even as the bosom of some mountain-lake,

discovered gradually by the uplifting of the morning mists. But no such revelation had taken place. Rather did it seem as if the increasing sunlight tended only to thicken the lowering fogs which still shrouded the great mystery, as though anxious to protect it from the searching eye of the morning; and her soul sickened at times before the thought that, perhaps, after all, the whole scheme was nothing more nor less than a mirage and a delusion. There were even moments when, tempted, as it would seem, by some persistent demon of doubt, she actually dreaded a nearer acquaintance with the enigma, lest, once it was unveiled, she should contemplate it with as much abhorrence as did Zelica the terrible countenance of Mokanna; and yet it was to this one idea that her father had devoted the best years of his life! To doubt its existence, or question the wisdom of its tenets, was to doubt, likewise, his probity, his intelligence, nay, his very sanity, into the bargain! But it was only from time to time that these unpleasant conjectures obtruded themselves upon her, and the peaceful atmosphere of her country home was well calculated to dispel them altogether.

Although she had once felt a certain jealous mistrust of Mademoiselle de Cramponaye the elder, she was, as she had informed her father, really attached to the younger sister. Adèle was a pretty brunette of about two-and-twenty, with small features, sparkling black eyes, and possessed of the winning manners and sprightly retorts peculiar to most of the women of her race, and Sophy had always found her a most agreeable companion.

A few days after the arrival of these French ladies at Little Stillingfleet, Sophy and Adèle strolled out together in the evening, walking, as is the custom with

young girls sentimentally disposed, with their arms affectionately entwined round one another's waists. They had left Mademoiselle de Cramponaye to entertain the blind man; for Sophy was endeavouring to subdue her first feeling of jealousy, saying to herself that this clever and accomplished woman of the world must needs prove a more interesting companion to her father than a mere 'slip of girlhood' like herself, and she had of late been deeply touched by the delicate attentions which the elder of the two sisters seemed ever ready to lavish upon him. Mademoiselle de Cramponaye did not now receive payment in exchange for her mesmeric passes, being regarded since her arrival, and at her own request, in the light of a friend of the family; but she did not begrudge the expenditure of some of her superfluous magnetic force from time to time, and this was about the hour when, having been put into a clairvoyant state by Adèle, she continued the treatment which she had commenced in London for the benefit of her interesting patient.

As the two girls crossed the lawn in front of the house, Adèle's foot became entangled in a long piece of string, and she would have fallen had it not been for the support of her companion's arm.

'*Ciel!*' she exclaimed, looking towards some object upon the grass. '*Quelle horreur!*' and she opened her round black eyes very wide.

'There is a whole romance tied to the other end of that string,' said Sophy, pointing to the tortoise Alexander, over whose hard shell the years seemed to have passed without leaving the slightest impression. 'That tortoise was given me by my cousin—a cousin I had never seen until one day when we met quite by accident in a hop-cart. After that I often saw him,

and I was quite in love with him when I was a little girl. All those woods up there, as far as you can see, belong to his father, who is now a very old man.'

'And since those days,' Adèle inquired, 'have you met often?'

'Never: that is the extraordinary part of it! When he came from Eton for his Christmas holidays, after I saw him last, his father had taken a house in London until Easter. At Easter *we* had to go up to see a celebrated oculist; at midsummer we were again in town; that winter we went abroad—and so, somehow, this kind of thing having gone on for years, we have never met again. And now he is a young man of nearly two-and-twenty, and I am quite grown up; two kings of England have died, the Reform Bill has been passed, and Queen Victoria has ascended the throne; and yet here is this stupid thing looking just the same as it always did!' and she tapped the shell of the tortoise somewhat impatiently with her little foot.

'*Elle n'a jamais éprouvé d'émotions,*' said the French girl, with a sigh. 'It is the emotions which make us change rather than the years. Happy animal! thou hast known neither loves nor hatreds!'

'I don't know how it *could* have known them,' Sophy answered, laughing. 'Tied up with a string to a stick, quite alone, and with such a very, *very* thick shell! But you talk as if you yourself had had loves and hatreds by the dozen.'

'*Qui sait?*' murmured Adèle, with another sigh; and Sophy felt afraid of continuing a conversation which seemed to give her companion pain.

Leaving, therefore, the solitary Alexander, she led the way across the spread of park-land to the right of the house; and, after descending a slope of meadow-

land, the two friends entered a wood of alders, where the ground began to rise again, joining eventually the fir-belt belonging to Sir Peckham Hickathrift of Poynings Abbey.

They had not proceeded far when Sophy, catching sight of a tall figure in one of the pheasant-drives, carrying a gun and accompanied by a black retriever, called out, in a playful voice,—

‘Now, Tom, pray what business have you poaching upon our preserves?’

‘Who is that?’ inquired Adèle, in a whisper. ‘*Le jeune homme à la tortue ?*’

‘No, no ; quite a different young man—our neighbour on the opposite side. That old abbey you passed on the road coming here belongs to his father. We call him “The Prince with the Nose.”’

‘*Dieu ! quel nez !*’ Adèle exclaimed, under her breath, as Tom Hickathrift advanced towards them, looking rather shy and confused.

‘*C’est le nez des Hickathrifts,*’ Sophy explained, with somewhat of an Anglo-Franco idiom. ‘And you mustn’t say a word against it. *Nous le respectons beaucoup par-ici !*’

But Adèle de Cramponaye, still astonished, continued in a low voice to call upon the name of her Maker, after the manner of the French, until Mr. Hickathrift came up to the place where she and Sophy were standing.

Thomas Hickathrift, since his schoolboy days, had developed into a powerfully-built young giant. He stood a little over six foot three without his boots, and had none of the ‘run-up-by-contract’ appearance which is often the accompaniment of great height. But for the peculiarity of his race already alluded to, and which

had grown with his growth, he would have been decidedly handsome. As it was, he was a handsome young man spoilt by too large a nose; but he had fine honest gray eyes, which looked out over it with the grave and faithful expression of a retriever; and, indeed, the cast of his whole countenance bore a marked affinity to that of the dog following at his heel. This resemblance did not escape Adèle de Cramponaye, who attached great importance to what Sophy usually spoke of as 'the outside of the platter.'

'*Dieu ! qu'il ressemble à son chien !*' she whispered as the young man approached.

'Yes; I've always noticed that people *do* grow very like their dogs. He has had this one a long time.'

And, indeed, Mr. Hickathrift's present dog was a puppy of that very black retriever which Godfrey St. Clair had so coveted when they were both boys together, more than seven years ago.

'This is my friend, Mademoiselle Adèle de Cramponaye,' said Sophy, as Mr. Hickathrift, after raising his 'wideawake' to the two young ladies, held out his hand. 'She doesn't understand a single word of English, so now we shall both hear how beautifully you speak French.'

It is needless to say, however, that this was merely a cruel practical joke on Sophy's part, intended only to make poor Tom uncomfortable, for there were times when it was her pleasure to tease and torment him.

'I'm sorry to say,' answered he, blushing, 'that I don't know a word of any language except my own;' and he smiled nervously, displaying, as he did so, a row of even white teeth under an incipient moustache.

'Dear me! how's that?' asked Miss St. Clair, looking at him with knitted brows. 'You that have

been so well educated at Eton and Oxford, and are now an officer in the yeomanry! I fancied, of course, you would speak it like a native.'

'Why, you see,' said the young man, naturally anxious to bring forward the few accomplishments he possessed, 'when I was at Eton I went in, as I've told you, more for rowing than "sapping." I won the "pulling" twice, and then I wanted to get into the "eight" . . .'

'And now, instead of travelling, and trying to improve your mind, you are always destroying life—shooting, or going out with the beagles; and then, upon the slightest provocation, you "have out the ferrets," as you call it. It's very easy to see that you're not a Buddhist.'

'No,' answered the young man, with a slight south-country burr, 'I am certainly not a Buddhist; and what's more, I don't see why I should be one.'

'The Buddhists,' said Sophy severely, 'will not destroy life, fearing, I have heard, to destroy their ancestors; believing, as they do, in the transmigration of souls. And one sees why. Supposing a man dies and is buried, grass grows over him, does it not?'

'If one isn't buried in a vault,' answered Tom—thinking, probably, of the 'two thousand dead bodies, nearly all of them Hickathrifts'—'grass might certainly grow on the top of one's grave. Well?'

'Well,' continued the gleaner in all fields of philosophy—the picker of the plums out of all creeds—'a cow passes by, we will suppose, or a sheep, and eats some of the grass. Part of that man's nature somehow becomes a part of the cow.'

'I see what you mean,' said the young man. 'But I don't see for that reason why one shouldn't shoot and amuse oneself, or have out the beagles.'

'We will suppose,' proceeded Sophy, going on with her idea, 'that the cow or sheep is killed, and that some part of it is given to a beagle . . .'

'Beagles,' said Tom Hickathrift, practically, 'are generally fed upon horseflesh.'

'Yes, I know; and the result would be just the same if the grass were eaten by a horse, or even by a rabbit.'

Her knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism being extremely rudimentary, she was not sorry to escape from having to follow up the transmigration of the beagle, which, in a country where *dog* has never yet been regarded as a staple article of food, seemed to present more difficulties than it would have done in the Celestial Empire.

'This rabbit,' she went on, quite confidently now, 'is eaten by a ferret—one of *your* ferrets, we will suppose—that horrid white one with the pink eyes—which in its turn is caught, killed, and eaten by . . .'

'No!' cried the young man, goaded at last into self-assertion; 'that really won't do! No animal that ever I saw or heard of could, or *would*, eat ferret! You've got wrong, somehow, in your calculation, though I'm not clever enough to say where.'

After touching upon several subjects less involved than Buddhism, the three young people retraced their steps towards the pointed gables of Little Stillingfleet. Mr. Hickathrift accompanied the two girls as far as the confines of the alder-wood, where he prepared to take his leave. As he raised his hat, politely but silently, to Adèle, she said, laughingly,—

'I know how to speak English a little: my silence was intended to tempt you to speak French.'

'It *did* tempt me,' answered he, laughing too; 'but that was all. So the plan didn't succeed. It extracted

nothing for mademoiselle to laugh at; and *I*, too, am decidedly a loser. I shall hope, however, to see you and Miss St. Clair again, before very long;’ and, whistling to his ‘faithful hound,’ the good-natured young giant strode off in the direction of his ancestral home.

‘I like very much that young man whom you call “The Prince with the Nose,”’ remarked Adèle, as soon as he was out of hearing. ‘I find him very amiable and *comme il faut*. *Il n’est pas très beau, mais il a l’air bon.*’

‘Ah, and, indeed, he *is* good!’ exclaimed Sophy, enthusiastically, for she was a most loyal friend. ‘He’s the kindest-hearted creature in the world; he wouldn’t even hurt a fly. That’s why one wonders at his being so fond of shooting.’

‘Most giants are amiable,’ replied Adèle. ‘And that was quite a pretty compliment he made me at parting, *for an Englishman!*’

‘Yes, I was quite astonished at it; for, generally, talking and writing are not his strong points.’

‘I should fancy not; perhaps he is what some people prefer—a *thinker*. Still, it seemed rude to tease him about his ignorance. And then you accused him, too, of being a poacher! Does he not object to it?’

‘Not in the least!’ answered Sophy, in an off-hand manner. ‘On the contrary, he likes it. The more one teases him, the more fond of one he becomes.’

‘Then you wish him to become even more fond of you than he is now?’ Adèle inquired, with an arch smile. ‘And yet it is easy to see that he is already *amoureux fou!*’

‘What nonsense!’ cried Sophy, reddening never-

theless. 'Why, we are exactly like brother and sister!'

'No two people *can* be "exactly like brother and sister" who have not the least possible relationship. A time always comes when either one or other of them will break down.'

'Oh, but *we* shan't!' said Sophy confidently. 'We've known each other much too long.'

'It may be that the breaking-down time has not yet arrived. Some day, however, it will come, and then you will remember my words.'

'I shall remember them, only to think how ridiculous and absurd they were. In France, though, I have heard, people talk and write a great deal about love. *Here* it never enters one's head; and two people can go on for years and years as friends, without thinking of anything more. It's something to do with the weather, I believe,' she added, thoughtfully, as she knocked off the top of a stinging-nettle, which happened to be in her path.

'Time will show,' rejoined the French girl, with the manner of an oracle. 'But I think you will see that eventually all will not go so smoothly.'

'*Indeed* you don't understand!' Sophy protested. 'It seems to me only the other day that we left off kissing. I do believe we kissed quite up to fourteen.'

'Which of you was fourteen—you or he?'

'*He* was, or he might have been nearly fifteen, and I was about nine or ten; and then I only left it off because I heard big boys didn't like their sisters to kiss them.'

'Ah, but that was some time ago, which makes a difference. You couldn't do so now, and I think you should leave off teasing him too, and calling him "Tom." What is his other name?'

'He is the son of Sir Peckham Hickathrift of Poynings Abbey,' answered Sophy, with some pride; for in her ears this ancient name was like the sounding of a clarion. 'But if I called him "Mr. Hickathrift," he would burst out laughing.'

'*Mon Dieu*, his name is as long as his nose! And is it possible that ancient abbey, as big almost as a town, belongs only to a "Sir"—a Baronet—your noble of lowest rank? I imagined at least that it was the possession of some Lord Mayor or Duke! The complications of your *Peerage* are most mysterious.'

'Well, I'll try and not tease Tom Hickathrift so much, though I can assure you he likes it. Besides, he knew I was only in fun. He wasn't really poaching, but good-naturedly shooting us a few pheasants, as he knew we had company; and the best of it is, that they're not *our* pheasants, but *his*—the poor things come into our ground from both sides. When I was a little girl, I used to attract them with corn and raisins, and, I'm sorry to say, now Nelus sometimes sets clams for them, when Tom isn't here to shoot them. My father, as you know, is half a vegetarian, as he objects to destroying innocent life. If he fancies, however, that the pheasants get into clams set for destructive creatures—quite by accident—he doesn't mind eating them; and I think it's good for him, as he seems to live upon air. I'm in treaty for some new steel clams that won't hurt the poor birds so much, and perhaps we shall catch you some to take back with you. 'You see,' added the youthful poacher philosophically, 'if *we* didn't kill the poor creatures, somebody else would! One hears nothing but guns in the shooting season popping round one in all directions.' It's dreadfully cruel.'

‘My sister,’ said Adèle, ‘likes very much birds of all kinds—to eat. But now, tell me, on which side is the property of your uncle?’

‘There: all those oak and beech-woods I pointed out to you before. If you like, I’ll show you where I used to meet my cousin when we were both children;’ and she led the way through the hazel-copse towards Great Stillingfleet.

It was a beautiful evening in the middle of October. A good deal of rain had fallen at the commencement of the month; and this had been almost the first fine day, though the clear pink and primrose of the heavens seemed to promise just such another to-morrow. In the air there was certainly a suspicion of coming frost, but only enough to tinge the cheeks of Sophy and Adèle with what looked like a reflection of the rosy sky, without causing them to feel chilled; and all Nature, as after a gala-day, appeared to be sinking gradually and gratefully to rest, lulled by a thousand little murmuring sounds from bird, beetle, and belated humming-bee.

When they had reached the well-known five-barred gate, the two girls remained for some moments in silence, leaning their arms upon it, and gazing up at the woods of Dallingridge Park.

‘How beautiful it is!’ exclaimed Sophy at last. ‘Could anything be more lovely?’

‘I am wondering in what colours one could paint it,’ rejoined Adèle, who, under the auspices of her friend, had been dabbling in water-colours.

‘I should begin by turning my paper upside down,’ Sophy answered, ‘to prevent the colours from running the wrong way; and then I should dash in a streak of yellow-ochre, or Indian yellow, at the lower part of the

sky, close to where I had sketched the line of the earth. This I should allow to run into a little pink-madder or lake, which would run into the indigo that I should lay on next. If I put blue next to yellow it would make green, so I separate them by the lake, and the indigo meeting it, would make just that lovely purple we see there over the pink.'

'I long to try it,' said Adèle. 'And then, what would you do next?'

'I should let it get quite dry, and then mix together all the colours I had used in the sky—indigo, lake, and yellow-ochre—only a great deal stronger, and not quite so wet; and with these I should dash in that mass of dark woodland as bravely as I could, avoiding, above all things, going over my work twice. I should then carry what colour I had to spare down into the foreground, leaving the paper unpainted for that streak of water which you see there looking quite white in the distance: and then, after that was dry, I should darken the nearer trees and shadows, and, if I could, I would paint in that violet cloud there, which is floating across the pink sky just like a great eagle. Ah, look! . . . As we are speaking its neck is getting longer and longer, and now it has quite floated away from its body. That's the worst of the sky; it won't ever stand still for a single moment!'

'Leading this happy life,' remarked the French girl sadly, 'you have nothing to occupy you but the forms of the trees and the colour of the sky. How I envy you! To me this is all as a delightful dream; but soon will come the awakening when I return to London, and then *quelle vie, quelle existence, mon Dieu!*'

'And yet,' her companion answered 'surely yours is a much happier life than that of most people? You

live in London, where you can see pleasant society ; and you can help your sister, and get to know all the clever persons who come to be mesmerised, and learn so much that must be worth knowing.'

'I do not find them particularly clever,' rejoined Adèle ; 'neither do I desire to learn what they would be best calculated to teach. I have been too long mixed up with the "behind-the-scenes;" to me it is all a *suprême bêtise*.'

'How do you mean ? You don't mean to say that your sister is an impostor ?'

'I mean to say,' replied Adèle, 'that she is not my sister at all. Heaven knows who are my real relations ! They must have disposed of me when I was too young to know them, in order that I might go through these so-called mesmeric performances—to act a lie, to pretend to be other than I am. Alas, when will it all end ?'

'Dear Adèle !' said Sophy, trying to console her ; 'it *must* end some day, of course, and then you will go home again to your real relations. Mademoiselle de Cramponaye will know who they are. You must try to imagine that you are only at school.'

'Alas !' exclaimed Adèle, sadly, 'to whose home am I to go ? I have none ; neither have I any means of discovering the parents who have cast me off.'

'Well, but some day you will have a home of your own, dear. You are very nice and very pretty ; some day you will marry, and go away from Wimpole Street with your husband, and be as happy as possible.'

'I do not think,' answered Adèle, 'that this is at all likely—the happiness, I mean. I have had only one real proposition of marriage in my life. It is the first, and probably it will be the last.'

'Then I should *certainly* accept it,' said Sophy, in a decided tone. (Thus lightly and ignorantly do we often dispose of the destinies of our neighbours!)

'It is occupying very much my mind at the present time,' rejoined the French girl, sighing. 'There are moments when I think that I will most certainly accept it, and then at others my heart is revolted at the very idea.'

'Ah, but I shouldn't mind that *one bit*,' cried her friend. 'I should certainly marry. What is the name of your admirer, and what is he like?'

'It is that,' Adèle replied with a shudder, 'which makes the idea so very terrible. His appearance is at the root of it.'

'Ah, but *every one says*,' Sophy cut in eagerly,—*'much wiser and more experienced people than I am,—that good looks in a husband are not of the slightest consequence; and look how happy some women appear to be, married to ugly men! In a week you will quite forget what he is like.'*

'Oh, no; never, never!' cried Adèle, earnestly. 'I should never, never be able to forget that terrible face! You know quite well the person who has made me this proposition—Mr. Wilson, of whom you speak as Mr. Carver. Ah! how can I ever forget that he is black?'

'Carver!' exclaimed Sophy, with an expression of horror. 'What a terrible thought! How *dared* he propose to you?'

'It would have been a very desirable marriage for me in many respects,' rejoined Adèle, humbly. 'And had he been of the same colour as everybody else, I think it might even now have been arranged. He is possessed of a good fortune, part of which he has acquired professionally; he is interested in those sub-

jects which I have studied under the auspices of my pretended sister, and I should have been useful to him in the production of the phenomena necessary to his representations. My sister is in favour of it; for we should then take a larger house, and perhaps all live under one roof, unless she also should marry’

‘O Adèle!’ cried Sophy indignantly, ‘how *could* she wish it? It must, indeed, never be! Surely *anything* would be better than that! For myself, I know that I would rather beg or starve.’

‘*You*, who have never had occasion to do either, and who are born to fortune and happiness, can afford to speak like this; but to *me* the idea of a permanent home’

‘*A permanent home!*’ repeated Sophy; ‘that would be the most terrible part of it! A permanent home with a permanent “mumbo-jumbo” in it!’

‘I think you have decided me against it; it did not require more than the weight of a straw.’

‘I am indeed thankful if I have. And now you will feel much happier. Consider that, if Mademoiselle de Cramponaye is not actually your sister, you should be all the more grateful for her care of you. She really seems very kind.’

‘She appears kind,’ answered Adèle, in a marked tone. ‘But she is always acting a part. She will appear kind too, no doubt, to other people, when she becomes your stepmother’

‘*When she becomes my stepmother?*’ repeated Sophy, changing colour. ‘What *can* you mean?’

‘I mean,’ answered the French girl, ‘that for a long time she has been endeavouring to marry your father, and it is only you who have not perceived it.’

‘Oh, it can’t be true!’ exclaimed Sophy, feeling a

chill at her heart, whilst the doubts and suspicions she had tried hard to thrust aside rushed back upon her with redoubled force. 'He never, never would marry again! He doesn't care for her in the least! He would be quite as much surprised to hear of it as I am.'

'I have told her that he does not care,' Adèle answered. 'I have said that he was of so vague and dreamy a disposition that he did not see what was under his nose . . .'

'He does not even see what is under his *eyes*, poor darling! And how was he, so trustful and unsuspecting as he is, to see through the machinations of that woman? But I will defeat them!' she cried, clenching her little fist, and bringing it down with some force upon the top of the gate—'I will defeat them!'

'And why,' Adèle asked, feeling called upon to advise in her turn, 'should you speak of these matrimonial designs as "machinations?" In life it is the desire of every ambitious person to rise, and happy are they who can do this without the sacrifice of their self-respect! My pretended sister entertains the project of marrying your father. She has weighed it and considered it in every light, and has arrived at the conclusion that it will be in all ways beneficial to herself and injurious to no one.'

'It is injurious to *me*!' exclaimed Sophy, in an altered voice. 'It will be stealing from me all that I love upon earth!'

'And for how long will you love him?' asked the French girl. 'For only a very little while; and then some young man will step in, who has never rendered you, perhaps, the slightest service, but you will love him twenty times as much, and he will carry you

away; whilst your father, who has given you all his care, will seem as nothing to you, and will be left alone in his blindness.'

'I assure you,' Sophy protested earnestly, 'that I shall never marry. It would be impossible to me to leave him.'

'Time will show,' replied Adèle, quietly. 'But I should have said that you were of the kind that will be certain to be married before very long; and bounded as you are, on the right hand by "The Prince with the Nose," and on the left by "the young man of the tortoise," it will be strange, indeed, if eventually you do not fall to the lot of one or the other of them. I am for the Prince with the Nose!'

'That is absurd!' said Sophy, somewhat brusquely. 'You speak without understanding. Come, let us go home.'

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Mr. Hickathrift had said that he hoped soon to have the pleasure of seeing Miss St. Clair and her friend again, he had meant to express himself in a very significant manner; and sure enough, upon the following morning he presented himself at Little Stillingfleet.

Sophy received him with a cordial grasp of the hand, which seemed to send the blood throbbing back to his heart. He noticed, too, with concern, that she looked extremely pale, and that her eyes appeared even larger and darker than usual. The fact was, she had not slept 'a wink' all night in consequence of the conflicting emotions aroused by Adèle's disclosures; and

the presence of her old comrade and neighbour seeming to her like a solace, she grasped his hand rather more warmly than had been her wont. For Thomas Hickathrift, at any rate, was *genuine*. Everything about him was real, even the hereditary feature, which she had often wished had been false, in order that she might have screwed it off and left him beautiful as a hero of romance. Like the conscientious Buddhist, she was beginning to shed her illusions, though, far from deriving happiness from the process, her heart ached anew with every fresh demolition.

Apart from the sense of disappointment which somehow seemed always to follow upon a closer contemplation of the tenets of the Great Cause, other 'causes,' convictions, and characters, appeared gradually to be losing form and substance, and evaporating, as it were, into thinnest air.

The so-called 'Aztec Remnants,' it was now surmised, had had in reality very little to do with 'the magnificent city of Ixymaya,' and 'the ancient sacerdotal caste,' so frequently alluded to in the pages of the pink pamphlet. Nay, even Sophy's father, notwithstanding his floating fund of credulity, was gradually veering round to the opinion expressed by his more conventional neighbour, Sir Peckham Hickathrift, to the effect that they had been in all probability 'Jew-dwarf-idiot' rescued from the purloins of Whitechapel.

Carver, too, was not 'Carver.' He was in reality 'Wilson,' or else, he was in reality 'Carver,' whilst 'Wilson' was only an assumed name. Adèle de Cramponaye had properly no right to be called 'de Cramponaye' at all. She was the unfortunate child of parents who had abandoned her—nameless, homeless,

a waif and a stray. Mademoiselle de Cramponaye (the elder) was also an impostor. An adventuress and a quack, endeavouring to better herself by an interested marriage, whilst her clairvoyant and mesmeric pretensions were all, according to Adèle's assertion, a *suprême bêtise*; but Thomas Hickathrift was no other than Thomas Hickathrift, as all the world knew, and in Sophy's present frame of mind this knowledge brought with it consolation.

It transpired that the object of his visit was to invite Miss St. Clair and her young French friend to a ball, which was to be given at the Abbey ere long, and which it was intended should be a combination of the usual yeomanry ball with certain festivities ensuing upon the occasion of his coming of age; for which reason it was to take place at the Abbey instead of at the George Hotel, and to be attended with circumstances of extraordinary magnificence; and, indeed, Mr. Hickathrift's public coming of age had been postponed for nearly six months in order to 'kill two birds with one stone,' by selecting a time of year when most of the leading county families would be able to assist at it.

He had brought with him a formal invitation from his mother addressed to Sophy, which, in order to show the friendly feeling at this time existing between the two families, I will transcribe at full length: it will also give the reader some idea of Lady Hickathrift's peculiar punctuation and style. It ran as follows:—

'MY DEAR SOPHIA,—As an old friend, once, of your father's, tho' of late years, circumstances, religious, and political differences of opinion, &c., &c., have combined to separate us more than would have been the case, I fondly trust, had the tastes of Sir Peckham and himself been

more in common, which I regret to say has not been *vouchsafed*. May I hope that you will be permitted by him to join the company we shall do the honour of inviting to a ball in celebration of the birth of our dear son, which would have taken place (as usual), at the Assembly Rooms of the George Hotel, on the 29th of this month, but, as is at present arranged, at the Abbey, in the ancient crypt. (Dancing to commence at half-past nine o'clock.) I am informed, by my dear son, that you have, staying with you, a young French lady, whom, tho' we have determined upon our company's being as select as possible, as she is a friend of yours, pray invite *de ma part*—bad manners, or breach of courtesy, being my abhorrence, as it is also Sir Peckham's, I need not say. Did I but know her name, I would write her a formal invitation *with my own hand*, which I am sure she will excuse under the circumstances. By coming early on Thursday, you will appear to be under *my wing* to those who *do not*. As you have no mother, you will, perhaps, excuse me for mentioning that *white* is usually worn by *débutantes*, particularly before their *presentation at Court*, and even afterwards. I can recall my own dress as being of that colour at a Court ball I attended previous to my portrait's appearing in the *Book of Beauty*. With our compliments to your father, believe me, my dear Sophia, yours affectionately,

A. HICKATHRIFT.'

'Of course,' Sophy remarked, after reading this letter aloud to her father, 'I can't go! Give my love to your mother, Tom, and tell her that the idea of my ever going to a ball seems quite ridiculous. Adèle can go if she likes.'

'We are, unfortunately, obliged to return to London to-morrow,' answered the magnetic lady, in what Sophy afterwards described as 'a kicked-dog voice,' 'so my sister will not be able to avail herself of the amiable invitation of *miladi*.'

At these words, so great was the weight which seemed suddenly to have lifted itself from Sophy's heart, that she could have performed then and there a spirited dance of delight, without attending the Great Hickathrift Ball.

'I don't see why the lovely and intelligent Sophia should not have the pleasure of attending the festivities upon this auspicious occasion,' Francis St. Clair remarked, greatly to his daughter's astonishment, as he turned his sightless eyes towards the place where he imagined that she was sitting.

'But I don't believe I can dance!' she answered, looking terrified; 'and then,' she added, making use of one of the favourite subterfuges of her sex, 'I haven't got a dress!'

'As I am returning to-morrow morning to London, can I not be of some use in ordering one?' inquired Mdlle. de Cramponaye, still in the voice of a *souffredouleur*.

'How fortunate it is that you should happen to be returning just now!' exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, with *naïveté*. 'If you would have the kindness to order what she will require, I shall feel extremely obliged. It is not often that we could hope for the co-operation of so valuable an ally!'

'But the dress won't fit!' said Sophy, making a last effort. 'It won't have been tried on!'

'I shall take the measure of your waist, your shoulders, your round the chest, and the length of your skirt, behind and before,' answered Mdlle. de Cramponaye the elder. 'Run upstairs, Adèle, and fetch me my *centimètre*.'

'Fifty-seven *centimètres* round the waist, 105 round the shoulders, length of jupe in front 109, at the back

119,' murmured mademoiselle, as she measured Sophy with the facility of an experienced dressmaker. 'The dress shall be white. With regard to flowers, do you prefer *marguerites*, or will you be satisfied with natural ivy?'

'Oh, natural ivy,' answered Sophy, carried away in spite of herself. 'It costs less.'

'Before arranging it upon the dress,' said Adèle, 'take only so much of oil of *salade* as might be placed in the eye, and rub over with it each leaf, wiping them afterwards; this causes a very pretty effect, as though of wetness.'

'It sounds awfully pretty,' remarked Mr. Hickathrift, who, astride on the seat of a chair, was gazing at Sophy over the back of it in rapturous admiration.

'And next, if you will give me one of your shoes,' continued Mdle. de Cramponaye, as though anxious to perform every jot and tittle of her commission, 'I will have a pair of white-satin shoes sent to you at the same time as the dress.'

'Oh, thank you!' answered Sophy, beginning unconsciously to flush with enthusiasm. 'My foot is the same size as Adèle's.'

'That will do, then,' said the clairvoyante, winding up her *centimètre*, with a sigh.

'Perhaps I might go as far as the Abbey to-morrow, when mademoiselle goes away,' remarked Sophy, addressing herself to the blind man. 'I could go in the fly, and then I could talk it over with Lady Hickathrift.'

'That will be capital!' cried Tom. 'You must stay to luncheon, and mother will drive you back in the pony-carriage.'

At this allusion to her approaching departure, so

melancholy was the expression that passed over the countenance of the elder of the *soi-disant* sisters, that Sophy could not help asking herself whether there might not have mingled, after all, something of *heart* as well as *head* in her matrimonial calculations. Of one thing she felt almost certain,—an explanation of some kind had taken place between her father and the Frenchwoman; and her manner and bearing was strangely like that of a disappointed suitor fleeing from the scene of discomfiture. There are some things, however, which are destined to remain for ever unexplained, and which it is best to dismiss at once from the mind in order that they may take their places alongside of such impenetrable mysteries as the parentage of Perkin Warbeck, the birthright of the Bourbon black nun, the man with the iron mask, the authorship of the letters of Junius, and a thousand other unanswered riddles, to endeavour to divine which is unprofitable in the highest degree; and Sophy, realising this, endeavoured, in the present instance, to dismiss her fears, feeling that upon Mdlle. de Cramponaye's departure the prime cause of her anxiety would be removed.

'Perhaps, Tom, you would kindly order a fly for to-morrow?' she said, as she bade farewell to the young man with the retriever face. 'A shut one, please, as there'll be some luggage. How tiresome it is that the coach doesn't pick one up now at the gate as it used to do!'

Before quitting Little Stillingfleet, Adèle felt called upon to give her friend another serious lecture upon her behaviour in 'making Mr. Hickathrift' (as she remarked) 'fetch and carry, as though in truth he were no better than the dog he so much resembles!'

'As if any man *could* be better than the best of

dogs!’ replied Sophy, laughing. ‘It’s a compliment to treat him like one, and he appreciates it.’

‘Ah, you are so happy that you can afford to be a little cruel perhaps! It is not my place, after all, to give you advice.’

‘You may *give* as much as you like; I am not obliged to take it! I hope, however, that you will not altogether neglect *mine*, for I too, like most people, can give extraordinarily wise counsel *to others*. Remember that your present existence, however miserable, may at any moment change for the better; whereas once you are unhappily married your life is, as it were, done for—at any rate, it will go on getting worse and worse.’

‘Sometimes,’ remarked Adèle pensively, ‘the first husband will die, and one marries a second more agreeable.’

‘Then I should certainly begin with the second,’ cut in Sophy eagerly.

‘Alas, that is impossible! He has no fortune, and the idea of our marriage has had at last to be abandoned.’

‘What! do you know him already?’ cried Sophy, astonished at her friend’s idea of approaching a second husband through the medium of the first. ‘I hope that he is *white*, at any rate.’

‘Indeed, yes. He is a professor of poetry, history, and elocution; young and beautiful as an angel, but without fortune. To marry at present would be to endanger the success of his career, so we have had to relinquish all thought of it.’

‘But you are sure to have other proposals,’ said Sophy encouragingly. ‘You are very young and very pretty, so I should certainly not marry, if I were you,

a person I wished out of the way. It must be such a terrible position. Besides,' she added, 'I believe nasty disagreeable people hardly ever *do* die. It seems always the nice ones that go.'

'Rather is it, perhaps,' replied the French girl, 'that once they are gone we speak of them as though they had been nice; knowing that they can never annoy us again, we forgive them, and try to forget their nastiness.'

'Perhaps so,' Sophy rejoined dreamily. 'With *me*, however—that is, in my small circle of friends—no one has ever died yet, "nice" or "nasty."'

'*Unberufen!* For once I must use a horrid German word. Take care what you say, and do not boast.'

'I don't see,' continued Sophy, with the manner of one thinking aloud, 'that there are many people even in *my* small world whose deaths would really grieve me. There's my father, of course; but I'm thankful to say, except for his blindness, he is as well as possible: he looks a little weary sometimes, and his face has grown lately terribly sad, but he has never had an ache or pain. Then there is Tom Hickathrift and Janus; but, you see,' she added cheerfully, 'I don't present a very wide target to the arrows of Fate!'

'How poetical you are! For *you*, the well-turned epigram, the allusion enveloped in metaphor; for *me*, the stern battle of life, the crude reality, the pill without the gilding, and unaccompanied by *bonbons!* . . . But yet there is the young man of the tortoise, who will probably occupy some place in your life after you have met him at this ball?'

'Do you really think that I shall meet him?' asked Sophy, opening her large eyes with a startled expres-

sion. 'Ah, but even if I do, he probably won't know me again!'

'He will know you soon enough if you are admired, and have a success,' answered Adèle, somewhat bitterly. 'For that is the way with men.'

'I never thought for a moment that I should meet him,' said Sophy, still looking alarmed. 'Do you really think that my dress will fit?'

'I will answer that it shall,' replied her friend reassuringly. 'And then, after I have superintended your *toilette de bal*, do not be surprised if I run away to escape from my own complications. Take warning by me, ere you permit yourself to become involved with two persons!'

After which final piece of advice the two young ladies proceeded together downstairs, and sought the society of their elders.

The Poynings fly, obedient to Mr. Hickathrift's orders, arrived on the morrow at the appointed hour; and as soon as the French ladies had taken their places, Sophy sprang into it with a lighter heart than she had felt for some days. Notwithstanding her friendship for Adèle, it was impossible to repress a sensation of intense relief. The door of the fly was closed at last, and after an exchange of parting civilities with the blind man, the driver mounted upon the box, and directed his way up the serpentine road which led towards Poynings, having received instructions to set down Miss St. Clair at the Abbey before conveying her companions to the George Inn.

CHAPTER IV.

AT length the day arrived upon which was to be celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of the birth of Thomas Hickathrift, which (according to the wording of his mother's letter) '*would* have taken place (as usual), at the Assembly Rooms of the George Hotel, on the 29th of this month, but, as is at present arranged, at the Abbey, in the ancient crypt. (Dancing to commence at half-past nine o'clock.)' And nearly an hour before the appointed time Miss St. Clair presented herself at Poynings fully equipped for the evening.

A girl's first ball-dress is not always a source of unqualified gratification to its wearer. More commonly, indeed, it serves only to impress upon her the truth of the saying that '*il faut souffrir pour être belle*;' and as this was the only occasion, since she had arrived at years of discretion, upon which Sophy had appeared in the costume which modern fashion demanded, she could not help feeling rather shy as she glanced down at her bare arms and shoulders, fearing lest, by some untoward movement, she might slip altogether out of her gossamer raiment, and appear in the more classical undress of the typical wood-nymph she so much resembled, with her 'strange sweet face and tresses ivy-crowned.'

No such catastrophe, however, was destined to come to pass. The dress, by some manner of miracle, kept in its appointed place; and upon beholding with what apparent indifference good Lady Hickathrift displayed to the multitude the bones and articulations of her meagre frame, Sophy felt her confidence in a great measure restored.

She had been permitted, upon her arrival at the

Abbey, to penetrate even unto the sacred precincts of the dressing-room, where she had looked on with interest whilst Miss Peacock gave the finishing touches to a most gorgeous and expensive 'twilight.' This consisted of a dress of orange-coloured *moiré antique*, over which was scattered a profusion of black lace, and what the abigail designated '*fleurs de cham*,' which, when translated, seemed to mean buckwheat, poppies, and other autumn field-flowers. The idea was repeated in the '*coifoor*,' arranged in pyramidal form, somewhat à l'*Espagnole*, and the whole effect appeared to Sophy terrible and imposing in the extreme.

The wearer of this magnificent costume advanced towards her with the utmost cordiality as soon as it had been successfully adjusted.

'My dear Sophia,' she exclaimed admiringly, 'you really look *quite* charming! I had hardly expected, indeed, that you would have been dressed with so much "*goo*." Look, Peacock, how new and "*recherchey*" is the "*corsarge*"!'

'It is indeed *most stylish*, my lady,' replied Miss Peacock approvingly. 'And I think I might do *hup* your ladyship's maroon "*glacey*" in the same fashion for the *hevening*.'

'It was not my idea,' stammered out Sophy, blushing under such sustained admiration. 'Those two French ladies who were staying with us—one of whom (the youngest one, Adèle) you so kindly invited to-night, only she couldn't come—*they* ordered it.'

'My dear Sophia!' exclaimed Lady Hickathrift, whose every sentence took the form of an interjection, 'that perfectly explains it, for the "*goo*" is thoroughly Parisian! But where,' she added suddenly, in a tone of perturbation, 'are your fan and pocket-handkerchief?'

‘My pocket-handkerchief,’ explained Sophy simply, is pinned on underneath my silk “slip,” as there wasn’t a pocket in the dress ; and I haven’t got a fan.’

‘*Dear me !*’ cried her ladyship ; and though she was apparently ‘less angry than sad,’ it was easy for Sophy to perceive that she had already committed some egregious breach of *etiquette*. ‘The fan and pocket-handkerchief of a *débutante*,’ said Lady Hickathrift, with solemnity, ‘are invariably held in the left hand—thus . . . ;’ and, at a sign from her mistress, Peacock rushed breathlessly towards the wardrobe.

‘Here, my dear Sophia,’ her ladyship continued, presenting Sophy with a fan and a piece of lace, ‘is a fan ; be careful of it, and do not on any account use it for fanning yourself, but hold it in your hand—so . . . the figures are very beautifully painted in imitation of Watteau. Here also, dear child, is a pocket-handkerchief—perhaps you could make use of the one you have pinned under your silk slip ; but hold this, with the fan, in your hand, so . . . I have (as Peacock will tell you) a special “*sentimong*” for both the fan and pocket-handkerchief, as I was painted with them in my hand in the portrait of myself which was afterwards engraved’

But at this moment a clanking sound, as though of spurs, sword, and sabretache, drowned Lady Hickathrift’s reminiscences, and ‘The Prince with the Nose,’ arrayed in all the glories of costume belonging to the ‘—— Yeomanry Cavalry,’ dashed into the apartment without perceiving Miss St. Clair, saying as he did so,—

‘There, mother ! Do you think I shall do ?’

Upon observing Sophy, he blushed very uncomfortably ; and she, too, could not help feeling confused.

Miss Peacock, however, came to the rescue, and in some measure dispelled their embarrassment by exclaiming,—

‘Ho, my lady, might the Miss Spearinks come in and see your ladyship *dressed*? And I am sure, mum,’ she added, turning to Sophy, ‘they would very much like to see your “twilight” as well.’

(Oh, the relief and pride experienced when one is called for the first time ‘mum,’ instead of the inevitable and perpetually-recurring ‘miss!’)

‘I am sure I see no reason why the Miss Spearings should desire to look at *me*!’ Lady Hickathrift remarked, fishing as usual for a compliment.

‘Ho, *my lady*!’ was all Peacock had time to exclaim, reproachfully, as she hurried off to fetch the impatient Spearings, who, upon being ushered into the presence-chamber (as Sophy afterwards informed her father) ‘prowled round’ herself and Lady Hickathrift ‘like wild beasts sniffing at their prey;’ nor was there the slightest detail in either costume which they could not have faithfully reproduced upon the morrow in the interests of their calling.

‘I’m glad that’s over at last,’ said Sophy, as she and Mr. Hickathrift descended the grand staircase together. ‘How shy it made one feel!’

‘I don’t fancy I should feel very shy if I looked like you,’ answered he, rapturously; and, indeed, at that moment, Sophy could not repress the pleasant consciousness of being a great deal better-looking than most people. It came upon her for the first time in her life, and it was, no doubt, an enjoyable sensation on the whole. Still, she was strangely out of her element; and she entered the brilliantly-lighted ball-room feeling like a person under the influence of

hasheesh when the action of the drug has been exhilarating rather than depressing.

O youth! delicious time! Time of the quick-flushing cheek, of the down-drooping eyelashes, of the heart that is set beating for so little and yet for so many! With all thy snares, heartaches, delusions, and tribulations, who is there that would not have thee back, were it possible that thou couldst revisit us again? For, surely, of all pleasures, this is the one which would the least pall with the twice tasting, and then—our first youth mapped out behind us like a country already explored, with its finger-posts, light-houses, and danger-signals—who but a fool would ever turn aside to wander into crooked pathways, or topple headlong into the depths of an abyss? . . .

Alas, vain desires and vainer resolutions! We have scampered rashly and hastily through the enchanted country, scarcely pausing even to observe its wealth of bud and blossom. We have sown broadcast our wheat or our tares, built our house upon the rock or the shifting sand, hoarded or dissipated our talents; and now, maybe, the journey is well-nigh accomplished, the harvesting is overpassed, and either our wisdom or our folly rises up as a witness against us, and stares us nakedly in the face! . . . But I am moralising at a ball; and though it is, perhaps, the place of all others where one feels the most tempted to indulge in such profitless occupation, no one has a right to interfere with the dancing.

A few guests only were as yet assembled—persons, chiefly, who had come from a long way off, and who had miscalculated the time it would take to get to the Abbey. These were standing about in groups upon the slippery floor of the ball-room, whilst Sir Peckham,

walking-stick in hand, passed cautiously from one to the other, endeavouring to fill up the interregnum previous to the advent of his wife with a little spasmodic conversation.

‘O Tom!’ Sophy exclaimed, looking up at the son of the house, as he stood now in the full light, glittering in martial panoply, his tall figure towering above those of the assembled guests, ‘I feel so dreadfully nervous! You *promised* you would dance the first dance with me. Tell me, do I look very horrid?’

‘You look *quite beautiful*,’ answered the young man, enthusiastically, his fine gray eyes beaming tenderly from above the hereditary feature; ‘and I’ll dance with you, of course, as many dances as you like.’

‘Thank you! How kind you are! I can’t help, of course, feeling rather strange at first; but I’m never frightened when I’m with *you*. How nice you look in your uniform! And what a dear little jacket that is, trimmed with fur, that hangs down by your left arm!’

‘I’m so glad you like it,’ Tom answered, pressing her hand gratefully. ‘Now you must let me take you all through the rooms.’ And they started off upon a sentimental journey, Sophy having received an approving nod from her ‘*chaperone*,’ as good Lady Hickathrift styled herself.

After traversing a long corridor, gaily decked out for the occasion, they reached a small anteroom, where Miss Peacock and a bevy of fair syrens were already presiding at a tea-table. Peacock, who had received her cue from Lady Hickathrift, assumed an expression of rapturous admiration on beholding Sophy upon the arm of her young master.

‘Tea, coffee, *hiced* coffee, or lemonade, mum?’ she asked, in her most persuasive accents.

‘Nothing, thank you,’ replied Sophy. ‘Oh, what a delicious room!’ And she flung herself into an easy-chair.

Mr. Hickathrift was beside her in a moment.

‘This is really all too beautiful!’ she went on, excitedly. ‘My head is quite turned by it, so forgive me if I talk nonsense; for I dare say I shall say things with no meaning, just to hide my shyness, and not to appear to people to be saying nothing. I wonder why they all stare at us so?’

‘It’s because you look so lovely!’ rejoined her companion, as he leant further towards the easy-chair. ‘Mother said you’d be sure to be the belle of the ball.’

‘What nonsense! I made up my mind that I should look worse than any one else.’

‘It must be very pleasant to find out your mistake,’ said Tom, feeling inspired, and looking unutterable things.

‘I saw myself in a long glass,’ she continued, candidly. ‘And, after all, I don’t really think I looked quite so horrid as I expected . . .’

‘You shouldn’t talk like that,’ Mr. Hickathrift interrupted, reproachfully. ‘Why run down what I admire so very, very much?’

‘Now I think I’ve got a little more confidence. You can take me back again to the ball-room, if you like.’

She was somewhat confused under such a fire of compliment, and for the first time in her life felt a desire to escape from a *tête-à-tête* with her old friend.

‘Oh, why should we go back just yet?’ he asked, looking disappointed. ‘Have some tea, or coffee, or wine, or lemonade?’ and he turned to Miss Peacock,

who, thinking the happy moment had come, had sent her assistants behind a screen, and arranged a crash of plates to drown the expected proposal.

‘Perhaps I might stay and have a little coffee,’ said Sophy, wavering ; for she shrank above all things from the performance of a hard-hearted action. ‘Wine or lemonade, or anything of that kind, would get into my head, as I am not accustomed to it.’

The coffee gave Mr. Hickathrift a short reprieve.

‘What an enormous quantity of sugar!’ she exclaimed, presently, fishing up a spoonful of sugar-candy from the depths of her cup. ‘I don’t like sugar. What am I to do with it?’

‘I’m afraid it was my fault,’ said Tom, in a contrite voice. ‘I put in too much. I’m so sorry! But I’m fond of sweet things myself.’

‘Would you like to have it, then?’ asked the child of Nature, ignoring the implied compliment, and holding out her spoon.

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Hickathrift, bobbing down his head till he encountered it.

At this moment three young gentlemen, clad likewise in the glittering accoutrements of the ‘— Yeomanry Cavalry,’ came clanking into the tea-room. Mr. Hickathrift and his young companion, being half hidden behind the leaf of the door, escaped their observation at first ; and two of the foremost made their way towards the refreshments, bent, apparently, upon bandying a few polite nothings with the fair beings who were dispensing them, under pretence of asking for a cup of tea. The third young gentleman, ignorant, seemingly, of their intention, turned back when he reached the opposite doorway, and, in seeking for his companions, his eye lighted upon Miss St. Clair

and her admirer. His brethren-in-arms rejoined him after a while, and they all three passed on together into the ball-room.

‘Who’s the pretty girl that was feeding Hickathrift with sugar, behind the door?’ inquired the officer who had first sought the tea-table.

‘I don’t know,’ replied the second; ‘but I’ll find out: I’ll ask Hickathrift. Tom’s a capital fellow, so I won’t go and ask him now and spoil sport—eh, St. Clair?’

‘I think I can tell you who she is,’ answered Godfrey, for it was no other than our former acquaintance, Godfrey St. Clair, who, with two friends, had passed through the anteroom. ‘I can’t be mistaken, though I haven’t seen her for years. I think she’s a cousin of mine; she’s very much changed since she was a child, but I never saw any one else with eyes like hers.’

‘Oh, who was that?’ Sophy exclaimed, as soon as the last speaker had quitted the apartment. ‘Do tell me! Can it be Godfrey grown up into an officer?’

It is strange how the memory of a first impression, even if it has changed and taken new substance with the years, will remain with us obstinately for all time. It is not the place here to hint at what the coming years brought, or did not bring, to Sophy St. Clair. Suffice it to say, that with them came no lessening or fading out of a memory which clung tenaciously to the end of her life; nor could she ever afterwards recall without emotion the new and mysterious sensation which flooded her whole being as she looked, for the first time since the days of her childhood, upon her early playmate, arrayed in the blue-and-silver uniform

which from that moment became to her as a sacred and hallowed garment, because it was that in which was clothed the bright ideal of her fresh young heart.

‘It is, indeed, Godfrey St. Clair,’ rejoined Tom, in answer to her question. ‘Surely you remember him? He’s in *my* regiment,’ he added, as though he had been the commander of the whole body of yeomanry.

‘Let us go back to the ball-room,’ she said by-and-by, in an altered voice.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked her companion, anxiously. ‘You look so pale. Have a cup of tea?’

‘Thanks; not just after coffee,’ she answered, absently.

A murmur of ill-concealed admiration greeted her return to the ball-room upon the arm of the son of the house; but she did not hear it. Her thoughts were far away from the brilliantly-lighted room, down amongst the leafy hollows of Little Stillingfleet, by the old bench in the hazel-copse, under the dark fir-trees of the rookery, in all the tangled places where she had had her child meetings with the boy she would never see again, the boy who had grown into this tall, dark, serious-looking man, who seemed not even to recognise her—the new Godfrey, newly crossing her path—the same, and yet not the same to her.

The music now struck up a quadrille; and when Sophy and Mr. Hickathrift took their places, she perceived that Godfrey St. Clair was to be her *vis-à-vis*. Just as she was wondering whether or no she should greet him as an old acquaintance, Tom very good-naturedly led him up to her side, and reintroduced to her the playmate of her childhood.

After the quadrille was over, Mr. Hickathrift had

to go through what he called 'a duty-dance' with the daughter of an influential neighbour; but Sophy did not remain long near his mother's orange-coloured *moiré antique* before her hand was claimed by Godfrey for the next dance.

'The one after the next is mine, you know,' Tom had said, as he went off in search of his partner. 'I suppose I shall find you here?'

'Yes, of course;,' and Sophy walked off, radiant with beauty and wreathed in smiles, upon the arm of her young kinsman.

But, alas for the promises of woman! . . .

When, having gone through his 'duty-dance,' Tom Hickathrift went in search of his lovely neighbour, he did not find her seated in the appointed place. Another and another dance followed, and still he failed to catch even a glimpse of her; and the ball seemed to him suddenly to become transformed into one of the most melancholy entertainments at which he had ever assisted. Godfrey St. Clair, too, was nowhere to be seen. As he passed through the tea-room, however, some time afterwards, he came suddenly upon the young couple seated behind the leaf of the door. Godfrey occupied precisely the same position in which he had found himself an hour ago. Miss St. Clair also was seated, as then, in the deep armchair with the red cover, whilst her cousin was leaning towards her, his dark eyes fixed eagerly upon her face. Her ivy-crowned head being turned to Godfrey, she did not perceive Mr. Hickathrift, who had just time to catch the following fragment of conversation:—

'How is the tortoise?'

'Oh, just the same; and he *seems* happy . . .'

'And the white cat?'

‘Alas, I’m sorry to say that he took to poaching, and so the Stubberfields . . .’

‘And the Great Cause?’ Godfrey next inquired, whilst at the same time he opened the cover of his watch, and appeared to be showing something to his companion. The two young heads drew closer and closer together, as though to observe some minute object. The impulses of Cain, in a modified form, took possession of Tom Hickathrift’s bosom, causing him to regret for a moment (notwithstanding his alleged unwillingness to ‘hurt a fly’), that the ties of vicinity and friendship prevented him from at once provoking Godfrey to a pugilistic encounter.

Closer and closer together came the two young heads.

‘I felt almost sure that I should see you,’ said Godfrey; ‘and so . . .’

‘Oh, oh, the caraway seed!’ cried Sophy, laughing, and throwing herself back in her chair.

It was evident to poor Tom that she had as utterly forgotten his existence as if he had never been born at all, and that this renewal of a childish friendship was advancing with formidable strides. He observed that she held a cup of coffee in one hand,—another instant, and she began to dip and dive into it, as before; and such was the effect of ‘the green-eyed monster’ upon the imagination of the young man, that as he rushed headlong from the tea-room, filled with bitterness and disappointment, he felt almost sure that he saw her feeding Godfrey St. Clair with sugar-candy out of her spoon.

CHAPTER V.

THE first ball at which 'the fair Sophia' had assisted, although seeming to her to have been a most brilliant and unprecedented success, could not fail to implant certain germs of bitterness in the maternal bosom of good Lady Hickathrift. She had held out her hand to this girl (as she said to herself), motherless—'*fatherless*,' one might almost add, so far as social advantages were concerned; she had invited her to her select ball, caressed her, '*chaperooned*' her, given her hints upon the subject of '*twilight*,' and lent her the fan and pocket-handkerchief which had been immortalised in the portrait afterwards engraved for the *Book of Beauty*. And what return had Sophy made for all these privileges? Contrary to her ladyship's particular request, she had made use of the fan and broken it; she had stained the pocket-handkerchief, also, with coffee-marks, which Peacock felt confident could never be '*got hout*;' and last, but not least, she had evidently gone some way towards shattering the large heart of poor Tom, the pride of the county, and the joy of his mother!

It may be as well, however, to inquire into some of the underlying motives which had induced Lady Hickathrift to make these friendly overtures in the first instance, apart from the sympathy she really felt for the motherless girl; and, in order to do this, it will be necessary to quote a conversation which had taken place some time before, between her ladyship and Mr. Andrew Locke, her husband's land-steward, a shrewd and confidential servitor, who took as much interest in the Poynings estate as did Sir Peckham himself.

Lady Hickathrift happened one afternoon to be

driving her ponies, and as she was accompanied by two outriders—a fashion in vogue at this time with persons of quality—she had no servant with her in the carriage. She was returning from conveying her friend, Miss Hornblower, to Dallingridge Rectory, when, half way between the Black Horse and the town of Poynings, one of her ponies became somewhat restive and impatient. Just as she was beginning to feel a little nervous, she observed Mr. Locke, with his back towards her, gazing sentimentally over the Little Stillingfleet gate; and thinking that she might confer a favour and secure a protector at the same time, she called to him condescendingly, and told him that if he was about to return to the Abbey, she would be delighted to give him a lift. Mr. Locke did not like to refuse so gracious an offer, and the two set off together.

‘I drove Andrew Locke home, my love, from Stillingfleet,’ she said that same evening to Sir Peckham, ‘and he was very grateful, and gave me a good deal of useful information, *for inferiors feel these things!*’)

‘Why, my good Locke,’ she had remarked to the ‘inferior,’ condescending to adopt a tone of banter, ‘you seemed quite *absorbed!* I almost think you must have been composing an ode upon Little Stillingfleet.’

‘Your ladyship is wrong for once,’ replied Mr. Locke. ‘For I was filled with envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness. That place is a regular eyesore to me.’

‘And why so, Locke? A peaceful sunshiny spot, a little amalgamated, perhaps, with melancholy reminiscences, when we consider how misspent has been the career of poor dear Mr. Francis . . .’

‘The Squire’s not nearly so black as he’s painted,’ interrupted Andrew Locke. ‘And I know for certain,

that though he's no churchgoer, he gives his share regularly towards all that is for the poor man's good; a little touched in the head, maybe.' And, like Mrs. Weller, he began tapping his forehead ominously.

'That is by far the most Christian supposition,' remarked Lady Hickathrift, kindly. 'And as he is by no means an unamiable man, it accounts for many of his outrageous doctrines.'

'My quarrel is not with Mr. Francis, my lady,' answered the land-steward, 'but with Little Stillingfleet. The Poynings property without Stillingfleet is just like a man shorn of his right hand. In the old maps 'tis down as a part of the Abbey lands; and more's the pity that man should have put asunder what God had joined together, as one might make so bold to say.'

'I fancy I have heard Sir Peckham say that it was in the time of his great-grandfather, old Sir Twiselton, that Little Stillingfleet passed out of our family; but I am sure we have a sufficient amount of landed property to spare so paltry a scrap.'

'True, my lady; but that farm, properly managed, might be made almost anything of. That slope of down to the right, that's planted now with rubbishy nuts and alders, could be grubbed up and "trunked;" and Sir Peckham wouldn't have a hop-garden that could be compared to it.'

'If so, I wonder, Locke, that Mr. St. Clair has never converted it into anything so profitable.'

'Any practical man would have done so, my lady,' answered Mr. Locke. 'But he's like all gentlemen that go early to foreign parts. It kind of turns their heads, I've noticed. I take it they're all the same.'

'When Mr. Francis dies, perhaps Miss Sophy will

sell the place, if she is allowed to do so by law; and then, if all goes well, Sir Peckham might purchase it.'

'I don't fancy,' said Andrew Locke, 'that she could sell it in law, and she'd have no call to do so, even if she could. Her father must have put by a good thirty thousand.' (Thus had the modest economies of Francis St. Clair grown in the public mind!) 'And, saving your presence, my lady, there's every chance of Mr. Francis outlasting Sir Peckham.'

"Man proposes, but God disposes!" ejaculated Lady Hickathrift, piously. (An 'inferior' would hardly have comprehended this saying had she delivered it, as she longed to do, in the original French.)

'Yes; but if man *do* propose,' rejoined Mr. Locke, mistaking her meaning, 'whoever is it likely to be? If 'tis not Mr. Tom, or young Mr. Godfrey, ten to one but she'll go and marry some peaky parson or outlandish foreigner, who'll be as stiff-necked as Lucifer, a regular thorn in Mr. Tom's side, maybe, after Sir Peckham is taken, enticing our best birds to himself, and very likely trapping them. . . .'

'O Locke! exclaimed Lady Hickathrift reproachfully, 'I *must* beg that you will refrain from casting any aspersions upon the Church! In these days, when such horrible things are talked of in both Houses of Parliament about reform, the educating of servant-girls, &c., admitting to them Jews, Turks, Infidels, and even Roman Catholics, where should we be, my good creature, if it were not for the clergy?'

'Well, they *do* act as drags, certainly, my lady,' replied Andrew Locke, whose broad opinions occasionally alarmed his patrons. 'And drags we must have, and no help for it, when we're going downhill, but we don't want them when we're on the high-

road to progress; leastways, such is my own private opinion.'

'O Locke,' cried her ladyship, 'you really are shocking me exceedingly! We all know what you are, unfortunately—a most red republican in your principles, down to the very backbone.'

'My principles and opinions are my own,' said Mr. Locke. 'And I trust your ladyship will admit that I have never thrust them either upon yourself or Sir Peckham.'

'No, no; of course not, my good creature!' cried Lady Hickathrift, alarmed at his manner; 'of course not! Well, then, Miss St. Clair, we have decided, is to marry a clergyman. . . .'

'She never ought, my lady! she never ought!' exclaimed the land-steward vehemently. 'She never ought to be let to marry anybody but Mr. Thomas!'

'Well, *really*, Locke,' Lady Hickathrift rejoined, bridling, 'when it concerns anything respecting *the estate*, your opinion is always exceedingly valuable; but in affairs which have to do with the matrimony of one's own family, though having, unfortunately, only one son, surely *a mother* . . .'

'Yes, indeed, my lady, as you say; and far be it from me to presume to give your ladyship advice—with Mr. Tom, too, such a favourite with all the young ladies; but there's one of these he seems somehow to fancy before all the others. And when I meet him, time after time, making believe to shoot in that ragged end of alder-wood up by the rookery gate—now it's the pheasants, now it's the rabbits, now it's the rooks themselves—I say to myself, "Ah, Mr. Tom, sir! what have all these poor dumb creatures done to anger you, that you should punish them so in all seasons?"'

for it's one go down and t'other come up with Mr. Thomas ; but, somehow, always in that particular bit of underwood. I wonder there's so much as a shrew-mouse left to hold its own !'

'*Really !*' said Lady Hickathrift, looking deeply interested. 'And since when, my good Locke ?'

'*Since always,*' answered her companion curtly. 'And she's philandered, too, with t'other side as well, or I'm much mistaken. She's a young lady that has made short work of every one that's come near her since she was in arms, like her mother before her.'

'*Really !*' exclaimed her ladyship for the second time, slackening the pace of her ponies, for they were nearing the Abbey. 'Though doubtless you are exaggerating, it would assume indeed a very dangerous proximity for my dear son, as also to her other side, could we suppose the continuation of the former state of affairs.'

'Mr. Thomas is very popular, and all that,' Locke continued confidentially. 'About *him* there's no pride or uppishness, and he's so fair-spoken to all the pretty farmers' daughters and barmaids . . . '

'*Barmaids !*' echoed Lady Hickathrift, with an expression of horror.'

'Barmaids, my lady,' repeated the cunning man, perceiving his advantage ; for this reunion of Poynings and Little Stillingfleet was one of his pet schemes. 'All these young persons seem to please Mr. Thomas better than grand company with their airs and graces, as has been remarked whenever any London ladies have been staying at the Abbey. He'd as lief be smoking a pipe along with Tom Stubberfield or Jerry Weller as with the Emperor of Roosia or the Pope o' Rome. So that, though there's no denying but what

Mr. Tom could do much better than marry Miss St. Clair, why, it's certain sure, my lady, that he might do a great deal worse.'

'Alas, my good Locke!' exclaimed Lady Hickathrift, 'really you do alarm me terribly, with your revelations most strange and unaccountable; and, to be sure, the example of poor Mr. Francis St. Clair— young, a really very handsome, distinguished man of old family—marrying, as he did, a common gipsy, though certainly one of the most beautiful women possible, and even what seems more strange, remarkably "*commy-fo*," frightens one for the ultimate well-being of one's sons.'

'It does indeed, my lady,' returned the landsteward. 'But now, with regard to Miss Sophy, one can't say what windfall may not come to the young lady. Why, if it so happened that young Mr. Godfrey of Dallingridge was taken—and we're all of us subject to the workings of misfortune—there'd be a sweep of country reaching as far as the eye could see, and our Mr. Thomas . . .'

'O you dreadful man!' cried her ladyship, with an assumed shudder. 'I declare you are for doing away with everything and everybody!'

But the words of the wily though well-meaning dependent had created an impression, one of the results of which was that Sophy was shortly afterwards invited to the great Hickathrift ball.

Several weeks elapsed, however, before the fond mother decided to speak upon this subject to her son, though, when she and Mr. Locke had finally arranged their matrimonial projects—the conspirators being somewhat stimulated by the very decided preference which 'young Mr. Godfrey of Dallingridge' was be-

ginning to display for his fair cousin—it was deemed expedient to consult Sir Peckham, whose opinion had always been considered of ‘great weight’ both in the county and in his own family circle. Sir Peckham, when consulted, had behaved precisely in the manner in which it was known and intended that he *should* behave. He had given several nervous jerks with his chin, snorted thrice, and exclaiming apoplectically, ‘Right! all right! Might do worse!’ had made hastily for the doorway.

And it will show of what plausible distortion of facts the human mind is capable, when the reader is informed that these incoherent mutterings were referred to by Lady Hickathrift, some few weeks afterwards, to her son as ‘those most solemn dying death-bed adjurations of my late precious husband, your father;’ Sir Peckham having been, in point of fact, cheated out of all death-bed ‘adjurations,’ ‘solemn’ or otherwise, by the relentless ‘kismet,’ which decreed that he should be choked at dinner by a fish-bone only a few weeks after the ball. Thus suddenly was Sir Peckham Brambletye Satterthwaite Twiselton Hickathrift gathered unto his fathers at the age of fifty-seven years, and Thomas, his son, reigned in his stead.

And now there fell upon Lady Hickathrift, apart from, and in addition to, her sorrow—for she had really loved this dull, spasmodic old gentleman—a great and terrible fear, which, though seeming at first somewhat vague and shadowy, came to assume by-and-by more formidable proportions, and haunted her perpetually day and night. This was occasioned by the thought that, perhaps, the time might not be far distant when the Hickathrifts, following the examples of the Peckhams, Brambletyes, Satterthwaites, and Twiseltons,

would actually cease to exist altogether, expiring in the person of her beloved son, who, though in the enjoyment of excellent health, was in the habit of indulging in manly pursuits not unattended with real, or fancied, danger in a mother's imagination. Under the influence of this idea Lady Hickathrift would have hailed with delight the prospect of Tom's union with almost anybody, except one of the gipsies, barmaids, or farmers' daughters, alluded to by Andrew Locke. She would have received, indeed, with open arms, as a daughter-in-law, any respectable young lady upon whom he had set his affections; and as, to all appearance, he had set his affections upon Sophy, the fond mother ended by forgiving her not only her indiscreet behaviour at the ball, but also her disobedience with respect to the fan and pocket-handkerchief.

When Lady Hickathrift had finally made up her mind she sent for Tom, and it was not without some trepidation that this worthy woman, so courageous in outward appearance, awaited the coming of her only son. Nay, even when he stood before her, clad in all his doleful six foot three and a half of 'unmitigated grief,' and looking kind, earnest, and tractable as usual, her heart failed her, and she only ventured to ask him to take her for a few turns upon the old battlemented terrace, which she had so often paced with one who could never pace it again.

Since the death of Sir Peckham Lady Hickathrift had become the very weediest of widows—the black borders of her pocket-handkerchiefs, writing-paper, and visiting-cards, were at least half an inch wider than those of other persons similarly afflicted; and as she pranced up and down the broad gravel-walk in her

dismal mourning array, she looked more than ever like a venerable hearse-horse being led out for an airing, all ready caparisoned for performance at some *pompe funèbre*.

Tom felt his heart give a sudden bound under the 'Paramatta' pressure of his mother's arm, when she had at length summoned up courage to make mention of the beloved name. It is as pleasant as it is unusual when the parental exhortation, or decree, is in exact accordance with the heart's desire; but 'the young Sir Tummus' (as he was now beginning to be styled), unlike what might have been expected of one so eligible, was buoyed up by no certain hope of reciprocated love and successful suit. More particularly did he recoil from the notion of striking before the iron was hot, or making hay before the sun really shone, for everything had seemed to him to be somewhat cold and cloudy of late.

His mother, on the contrary, was for getting the preliminaries over as soon as possible, in order that the wedding might take place quietly and snugly as soon as the first year of her widowhood had expired; for she foresaw that the lawyers would make a good long business of the settlements. With this view she suggested an early day in the ensuing week as the one upon which it would be expedient for him to make his formal proposal to Sophy, though she left it to him to determine whether he should not, even before that, broach the subject privately to her father.

As she was speaking, Tom observed that she was struggling to remove a large ring which, contrary to modern custom, she always wore upon the forefinger of her left hand, of which the joint was somewhat knotty, so that it seemed no easy matter to draw it off. This was, as he knew perfectly well, nothing

more nor less than the great Hickathrift ring of betrothal—Sir Brambletye, old Sir Twiselton, the two succeeding Sir Thomases, and, lastly, Sir Peckham himself, had sealed to themselves their respective females by the placing of this family jewel upon the forefinger of the left hand, so that it had occupied its present position for very nearly thirty years. It was of enormous size, the setting taking somewhat the form of a Gothic window, and the centre jewel, backed with foil, being altogether an uncanny and suspicious-looking stone, seeming something like a cross between a nondescript ruby and a cough lozenge, which must have owed its prestige entirely to the solemnity of its hereditary function, or to the social position of its wearer.

‘Oh, mother!’ exclaimed Tom, fairly awe-stricken when he perceived her intention. ‘Whatever are you going to do?’

‘I am about to present you with this family jewel,’ she replied, in a tragic voice. ‘Take it, my dear boy,’ (and she withdrew it with a final wrench); ‘and after you have asked her to become your wife, place it thus upon her finger, whichever one you like, for I do not suppose this is of consequence. With your blessed father it was the one happening to be nearest to him at the time, where it has remained for thirty years this Christmas, which is now so very shortly impending, you having been born, as you are aware, quite eight years after our marriage, and being now, consequently, twenty-two. . . . You may have noticed in the engraving executed for the *Book of Beauty* that this ring . . .’

But here her utterance was choked by emotion, and with a sob she handed over the hereditary jewel to her son, who was fully impressed with the solemnity of the

occasion. The presentation possessed, indeed, all the dignity of an investiture ; nevertheless, he felt a kind of superstitious reluctance about taking the ring, which he began rolling about in the palm of his hand, and eyeing somewhat mistrustfully.

‘I think I would rather you didn’t give it me quite yet,’ he said, making as though he would return it. ‘It *does* seem like being so awfully sure. If she were to refuse me . . . ?’

‘*If she were to refuse you !*’ repeated his mother in astonishment. ‘*Surely*, my dear boy, you have no reason to suppose that poor dear Sophia is out of her senses ?’ and for the first time since her bereavement Lady Hickathrift actually laughed aloud.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT Sophy St. Clair had never thought less of the neighbour by whom she was ‘bounded on the right hand’ than during the last two or three weeks. At times, perhaps, when she either heard or read of any act of slavish devotion, of dog-like fidelity, of Herculean strength, or of imperturbable good-humour, she would murmur to herself, kindly, though somewhat contemptuously, ‘How very like poor dear Tom !’ and then she would straightway forget his existence, until he reminded her of it, either by paying her a formal visit or by meeting her—quite by accident, of course—during her sylvan rambles.

Upon the death of Sir Peckham she had felt a great deal of sympathy for him, knowing that he had always been a devoted and affectionate son ; and she

had written him a few words of neighbourly condolence, besides cutting out of the local newspapers an account of the funeral, together with some extracts from the family history. These she had intended pasting into a scrap-book ; and although she forgot to do so, and even lost them shortly afterwards, Tom was very grateful to her for this sign of interest.

When any old companionship, habit, or pastime, gradually ceases to occupy us, it is usually owing to the fact of our having acquired other companionships, habits, or pastimes, of a more engrossing nature ; and it may be that, in the present instance, Sophy's seeming apathy with regard to 'The Prince with the Nose' was to be accounted for, in some measure, by the growing interest she felt in 'the young man of the tortoise.'

But perhaps her feelings upon this, and several other subjects, will be better understood if I venture to transcribe, for the benefit of the reader, a letter which she addressed, at about this time, to her young friend Adèle ; it ran as follows :—

'MY DEAREST ADELE,—I have really got so much to tell you that I don't know how to begin, "the plot" having seemed, as it were, to have been "thickening" so dreadfully lately, and the days having rushed by so quickly, that I have been unable until now to find time to take up the thread of the narrative. Praise be unto Allah ! none of the catastrophes which you predicted have come to pass ; though it seems to me that, since the ball, I think quite differently upon several subjects.

'The ball was really—what I never expected it would be—a real success and a real delight. Everything looked beautiful, except most of the people ; *they* seemed, somehow, to spoil it : but they were all very kind. My aunt, Mrs. St. Clair of Dallingridge, was there with her son. I avoided

her, on account of the feud, but got to know *him* very well. She was in black, with diamonds, and appeared to me to be lovely, only with a face rather like a mask. It was quite owing to you that my dress looked as it did. I was at first afraid it would slip off; but seeing other people dressed in the same way, seeming not to care in the very least, I threw all my fears to the winds, and made up my mind to enjoy myself, *which I really did*. My father seemed very much pleased at what he heard about my dress from the people who could see it; and my belief is that I shall be now allowed, and even encouraged, to dress in a civilised way as long as I live. Hitherto he has certainly held rather odd opinions with regard to costume; but all this is now very much toned down, and I ought to be the last person in the world to laugh at him, as his one wish has been all along for my future good. You know, however, that I am of that horrid nature that laughs at *anything*, however serious or sacred, and I do believe that I should make a joke upon the scaffold if I saw anything comic in the appearance of the axeman. But my dear father's idea about wearing *so very little* (which is mixed up in some manner with the Great Cause) springs only from a wish to imitate Nature, and insure good health. His wish is that I should live to be one hundred and four, like most of the Nubians (as he tells me), who wear no clothes whatever, eat rice and fish, bathe a great deal in the Nile, and anoint themselves all over with castor-oil. By-the-by, I heard him say, last night, that the ancient art of "anointing" properly was utterly *lost*; and as this seems to make him really unhappy, I thought I would try and find out if one could not discover the secret. Ask "Othello" what he used to do to his skin when he was in his natural state; for, dearest Adèle, I feel sure that that horrid Carver (I can call him by no other name) is, in reality, only an *escaped savage*, and not any more of a clergyman, or missionary, than I am! How I sympathise with you when you tell me of his persecutions! But remain

firm, and you may then perhaps be rewarded by marrying your second husband first, after all.

‘Sir Peckham Hickathrift, to whom that old Abbey belongs, which you thought was the lord mayor’s (you remember, the father of “The Prince with the Nose”), is dead. The funeral was a *walking* one; the coffin being carried by eight of the oldest labourers on the estate in smock-frocks. Janus and I, and the Great Prophet, stood on one side of the road and saw it pass, and the Prophet was surprised that a man of such high rank shouldn’t have had “howlers:” but I am so ignorant of all these things, and so is Janus, that I didn’t even know that it was the custom. . . . By an odd chance, just as I was writing these last words, I heard a footstep upon the gravel-walk, and on looking out of my window, who should I see but “The Prince with the Nose” himself, standing in the porch, having just rung at the bell. However, he has asked to speak to my father upon business, I find, so I shall have plenty of time to finish this letter before I go down and see him. He has, as you may suppose, a good deal to do just now, having just come into such a large estate, and he is glad to consult my father and ask his advice. By-the-by, please do not go on calling my cousin, Godfrey St. Clair, by that ridiculous name which you gave him when I told you about the tortoise, for I don’t see in it *the slightest attempt at wit*. He is very tall, rather dark, and quite different from anybody else in everything. I have seen him once or twice since the ball; we meet sometimes, by accident, in the woods, but all this I cannot write about. My father has just given me a present—two most beautiful Arab horses, sent over to him by a Sheikh he once stayed with, and who is grateful to him for all he has done for him, *politically*. They came over with an Egyptian called Abdallah, who is going to stay on here with us for about a month. I believe that when he was quite young he travelled with my father and mother as donkey-boy before I was born. On account

of the difference of climate he has caught a cold, and coughs a good deal. My father is quite delighted, as you may suppose, at having this opportunity of airing his Arabic, though he says that the Egyptian Arabs do not speak it by any means well. One of the horses is black as Erebus, and is named "Camaralzaman," but we call him "Cammy" for short. He is a delicious creature, with a beautiful long tail; and he has been taught, when he is standing still, to arch his neck and stretch out his *paws*. This is the one I am going to begin by riding, as the gray one, "Hasheesh," is not nearly so quiet, and *rears*. Nelus and Janus insist upon calling him "Ash-ash," and I can see that they will never get his name quite right. All this is to tell you that I am in want of a riding-habit—you will know, I am sure, where to get one, and what measurements I ought to send. I am not yet quite used to a civilised side-saddle; but having been accustomed to ride Billy and Dragon, the two cart-horses, bare-backed, I am very good at sticking on. It is a bright frosty day; and before it is over, I am going to take my father for a little turn; besides which, I must see Tom before he goes away, or he may think me unkind. Good-bye, therefore, my dearest Adèle; revenge yourself upon me for this egotistical letter by writing me one, very soon, all about yourself; and believe me to be ever your affectionate friend,

SOPHY ST. CLAIR.'

But when, having hurried over the last part of this epistle, Sophy presented herself at the entrance of the sitting-room, she was informed that Sir Thomas Hickathrift had just departed, without having even asked to see her; at which she could not help feeling some surprise and disappointment, for it is always pleasant to look upon the face of a true friend (if there is no one better loved in the way), though it be the face of a *friend only*, and even if, as in the present instance, one has long ago '*left off kissing*.'

Finding that her father seemed to prefer pursuing his own meditations, as he walked up and down the straight gravel-path in front of the porch, to going for the proposed 'little turn,' Sophy determined to start off for a ramble alone, and it will not, perhaps, be altogether a surprise to the reader to learn that she directed her footsteps towards the place where it was most probable that one of those meetings with her cousin might occur, which she had referred to in her letter, as merely accidental. To this letter Adèle's reply arrived in the course of a few days; literally translated, for it was written in French, it ran thus:—

'MY VERY DEAR SOPHY,—Having thrown my pretended sister into a state of pretended *clairvoyance*, I leave her with her last victim—the one who has replaced thy worthy and dear father—a proprietor, very rich, but deaf, from the *Pays de Galles*, named Lloyd, Lewis, Thomas, or all three united. I retire myself to this sad apartment, whence I proceed to indite thee this letter, even more sad still! Thou wilt know, very dear, how to figure to thyself the appearance of *la pièce*; the aspect as of a flown-away grandeur, which animates rather the original design of each *meuble* than their actual faded desolation. Also they are not, nor of the most clean, nor of the most cared-for, as well thou knowest! Amidst the pile of a carpet, rich, but dilapidated, repose the *débris* of the bones left there by the female poodle of my sister—partly gnawed; at each step the foot encounters them, for our one *bonne*, occupied with her other duties of *ménage*, can with difficulty keep the more important *salle* in the order of which this one must pass itself. The sentiment of sadness engendered by the monotonous ticking of the *pendule*, which, with a tarnished *garniture de cheminée*, regards me sadly in face, demands of me my strongest resolution to dominate. Without, one of those fogs, yellowish (*jaunâtre*), all particular, which exist

only in London, is doing its possible to obscure the very little of light which remains to us in an afternoon of the month of November. Lamps are already illuminating the streets, though with a light which by its melancholy alone escapes being ridiculous. The *paletot* of the policeman at the corner of the street is glistening with moisture, as are also all those of the cabmen; and by the violence of the blows which they aim from time to time at their chests, I suspect that it is making a cold of dog. Thy poor Adèle, however, has not been outside the door for several days, having suffered from a neuralgia of the most abominable. Vainly, and without results, did she repose for one whole morning in the arms of her dentist (a man amiable and full of wit); for though (that Heaven may be lauded!) the rebel tooth is no longer in existence, her pains have not ceased to live at the same time with him. Imagine, then, if thine Adèle, under these afflicting circumstances, can find the courage to write thee the agreeable letter she meditated! Rest quiet upon the subject of your *amazone*; knowing the difference which exists between thy figure and mine own, I shall succeed, if thou wilt amiably fill up the here-joined measurements, in executing, without fail, your commission. Would that Heaven had willed that *I* also had possessed a steed of the desert, upon the back of which I might escape from the complications which environ me! How soon would I leave behind me that Wilson,—(said “Carver” by thee). But if ever a sad destiny decrees that I should espouse him, oblige me by ceasing to allude to him in thy letters as “Othello,” a name which to all young married women must be filled with sinister associations. His persecutions continue; and even now, were I to summon courage to face this inclement weather, I feel convinced that I should encounter him amongst the fog, like a demon of bad augury. And now, whilst I am thinking of it, be not surprised should you receive, at your address, letters from him directed to me, which you can afterwards send me

with the ones you write me, or when you have occasion to send to London ; for I have a project by which I hope to escape, for a time at least, from his persecutions. It is this : I shall pretend, whilst, owing to this "rage of teeth," I am unable to leave the house, and when he will not, by consequence, perceive me, that I am in effect absent, making it to be believed that I am staying with thee. Should he ever have the audacity to present himself *chez toi*, thou wilt, I know well, allow thine influence to take the direction of my desires, and in this manner merit my eternal gratitude. Thanking thee beforehand for thy *complaisance*, and embracing thee with all heart, I remain ever *tout à toi*,

‘ ADELE.’

And, indeed, shortly after the reception of this letter, two others arrived addressed to Adèle at Little Stillingfleet. The first was from Mr. Carver, with whose handwriting Sophy was familiar, but the second was evidently from a different person altogether.

‘ Ah,’ thought she, as she turned over this letter curiously, ‘ I suppose this must be from the second husband ; and I dare say it’s the only one she really wants. However, I’ll send her the “ tares with the wheat,” ’ and she placed both the letters together in order that she might despatch them to her friend on the earliest opportunity, accompanied by a few lines from herself.


All this, however, is a digression, as it did not take place until some days after the one upon which this chapter opened ; whereas the ‘ young man of the tortoise ’ has been waiting at this present time for very nearly a whole hour near to the confines of his uncle’s property. He has been seated for a part of the hour upon the trunk of a fallen oak-tree ; and he has traced so many hieroglyphics upon the ground with his stick,

decapitated whole families of scarlet toadstools, cut down such quantities of dock and burdock, besides having hurled quite a hailstorm of sandstones at the rails of the five-barred gate, that it may be as well to inquire into the secret cause which prompted him so determinedly and unprofitably to waste his time—to guess as to whether he is, or is not, waiting for anybody; and, if he is indeed waiting, to hint at the reasons which make *her* so long in coming to the tryst.

CHAPTER VII.

As soon as Sophy had thoroughly made up her mind that Godfrey St. Clair was 'quite different from anybody else in everything,' she felt unconsciously influenced by her own conception of him, and discovered that, in his presence, she could not behave precisely as though he had seemed to her like an ordinary mortal.

Never having before experienced anything in the least akin to this sensation, which was one of mingled shyness, embarrassment, and even, at times, of positive discomfort, she endeavoured to defy and combat it as far as was possible to her; and she succeeded, in the course of her efforts, in becoming almost as different from her usual self as Godfrey appeared to be from the rest of mankind. If this self-consciousness, or timidity, or whatever may have been its proper name, did not take the form of a state of partial stupefaction, with monosyllabic responses, in the presence of her unconscious tormentor, it usually impelled her to assume with him a tone of flippant banter, utterly at variance with her real nature, or she would even go so far as to



venture upon a joke, or introduce, perhaps, a play upon a word.

At these he would generally condescend to smile, kindly, though (as she fancied) rather regretfully; but he never gave vent to those encouraging peals of deep-mouthed and genuine laughter which were wont to follow each one of her lively sallies when Tom Hickathrift was her listener.

And, indeed, there was something in the outward demeanour of Godfrey St. Clair which seemed to indicate that he was, to some extent, different from most people. He possessed, above all, a calm impassiveness rarely to be met with in so young a man, whilst a certain air of dignity and self-restraint appeared to discourage anything in the shape of a gushing freedom of expression, raising up, as it were, a barrier which concealed his inward man from the eyes of the curious and importunate.

Having passed many years in the society of a father so much his senior, he had unconsciously acquired a somewhat ceremonious and formal style of address. He possessed, in fact, what would have been termed at the court of *le Grand Monarque*, '*de hautes manières*;' and, as if from the fact that he did not affect any familiarities himself, he seemed desirous of discountenancing them in others. It is true that the chilling reserve of his mother, his father's formal pedantry, and the didactic utterances of Pettigrew (who was now almost a constant inmate of Dallingridge House) alternately wearied and disgusted him; and yet, unconsciously, his manner had caught something from theirs, and the *real Godfrey* was so artificially concealed that he might not even have recognised himself had the veil been uplifted.

If it be true that those who have first dominated

themselves are more likely, in consequence, to obtain the mastery of others, the reason of Godfrey's influence over his youthful cousin may be easily explained, since hitherto he had held himself so thoroughly in hand that he had hardly ever permitted himself to follow a single unchallenged impulse. Nay, ever since the day when, as a mere baby, he had been reproved for displaying a feeling of pity for an unfortunate criminal, he had been taught to believe that misdirected sympathy lay at the root of all wrong-doing, and, by dint of striving for ever to suppress his natural emotions, he had ended by seeming to possess hardly any emotions at all.

It is true that, as yet, he had never desired any one particular object over-eagerly, so that his powers of self-control may not have been very satisfactorily tested. He had lived the life of most young men of fortune who are not destined for any particular profession, and his experiences were on a par with those of the greater number of his college companions, though a strict vigilance over his own predilections, and the power he possessed of reasoning himself out of any passing fancy, had made him hold aloof from many of their follies. Upon the present occasion, when he had strolled forth upon the afternoon of this bright, still, November day, he said to himself that it was no dangerous or reprehensible impulse which caused him to direct his footsteps towards the borderland of Little Stillingfleet, but only a pardonable and very natural desire to catch another glimpse of his bright-eyed cousin, and that, in consequence, he might give way to it, and proceed. He had loitered about the high ground overlooking the hazel-copse for some time, feeling strangely restless and unsettled; finally, he had seated himself upon the trunk of the fallen oak-

tree, wondering at his own impatience, as he endeavoured to kill time in the various ways described.

Just as he had flung the last piece of sandstone within his reach somewhat violently against the top bar of the wooden gate, he heard a light footfall amongst the crisp leaves in the woodland pathway, and in a few moments Sophy was beside him. She wore a walking-dress of dark tweed, and a hat with a bright-coloured feather, and, as she came smiling towards him, he thought that he had never seen a more lovely vision of girlish beauty. Sophy, too, could not help looking up at her cousin admiringly. Standing there hand in hand—the tall dark young man, with his upright figure and picturesque head, and an expression strangely at variance with the stern code he had drawn out for himself; and the beautiful girl, looking up eagerly at him, her eyes glowing with trustfulness and hope—they made a very pretty picture.

‘Good afternoon, cousin!’ Sophy exclaimed, smiling archly, though her heart was beginning to beat in a very unaccountable manner. ‘You look as if you had been waiting for me!’

‘I *was* waiting for you,’ he answered. ‘What made you so late?’

‘How should you know that I meant to come at all?’ she asked, seizing upon the chance of an argument in order to hide her embarrassment. ‘It was only by accident that I happened to come this way. I was going to walk with my father, but I found he wanted to be left to himself.’

‘I knew that you would be here,’ said Godfrey quietly. ‘I *willed* that you should come, and you came.’

'You "*willed*" that I should come? You speak as if I were your "slave of the lamp," and bound to obey your command!'

She was trying to lash herself into anger, provoked at the sense of discomfort she seemed always to experience in Godfrey's presence, whilst he was always so calm and collected.

'Ah!' replied he, lingeringly and a little regretfully, as he drew a long breath.

Sophy mused for many days afterwards over this enigmatical 'Ah!' wondering what it could have been intended to convey, for at that moment the curse of shyness fell upon her, and she felt afraid to inquire. Could he have meant that he wished she had indeed been a slave, but that it was impossible? 'Ah, that you were really my slave, so that I might summon you at my will!' Had he meant this? Or was it that, when she had thus spoken of herself, he had intended her to understand that the slavery was all on the other side? '*My* "slave of the lamp"—alas, it is *I* that am *hers*!' Or had he meant simply, 'Ah, this girl is *too stupid*; it is impossible to make her understand; I am only debasing myself by holding communion with one so much beneath me!' and then sighed from very weariness of spirit?

'I must go home now,' she said by-and-by despairingly, for she resented this feeling of helpless constraint. 'I only came here to see you for one minute;' and she began nervously gathering together the folds of her skirt.

'I thought you said you hadn't come to see me at all!' remarked Godfrey, smiling, as it seemed to her, with the complacency of a cruel angler rejoicing at the painful wriggings of the worm upon his hook.

‘We have some one coming to stay with us this afternoon,’ she answered, ignoring his question, and rattling on very fast. ‘He’s a really great man—a seer, a prophet—the chief mover in the Great Cause. I think I have told you about him before. To-morrow we have invited some people to meet him at dinner, as Saturday, the day after, he is obliged to go away. This gives me a good deal to do just now. Many of them are coming from long distances on purpose to see him; for some people think him one of the most wonderful men that ever lived.’

‘Indeed! But why should we remain standing?’ and, like Sir Walter Raleigh, he was about to take off his coat and spread it upon the fallen trunk, when she prevented him by saying,—

‘Oh, please don’t! You’ll catch cold! It’s really quite dry; besides, I am used to “roughing it.”’

‘I’m sure you ought to be well taken care of,’ rejoined her cousin, as he slipped back into his coat, and, with the courtly manner of the olden time, led her towards the fallen trunk, as though it had been a couch of samite or brocade. ‘And this wonderful man,’ he went on, as soon as they were both seated, ‘is he a foreigner or an Englishman?’

‘He is an Asiatic mystic,’ Sophy answered, feeling now that she had full command of her subject; ‘but he speaks all languages. He has seen an immense deal of every kind of extraordinary thing, and he has inquired deeply into all sorts of hidden and mysterious arts, which are supposed to be inculcated in remote corners of the Oriental world. He has explored all the mysteries of the Ansari,’ she continued, quoting her father’s oft-heard description of his leader, ‘in their hidden caverns; the most recondite secrets of the

Druses are said to be in his possession; and he has dwelt with the Yezedis, or devil-worshippers, and witnessed their dark rites; the triple cord of the Brahmins, the prayer-wheel of the Buddhist, is not strange to him. Lately he has identified himself with our friends the Turks of the Súfí heresy. . . . My father has a very great respect for him; he consults him upon all political and religious questions.'

'Your father, then, believes in some kind of religion?'

'He is an extremely religious man, *really*; that is to say, he thinks a great deal upon spiritual subjects; but he has a great dislike to all accepted forms.' . . .

'He attacks, in fact, all existing religions, in order that he may invent one of his own. I suppose this is really a true statement of the case?'

'Oh, no, indeed, he doesn't *attack* existing religion!' protested Sophy. 'He says that would be, as the French say, "hailing upon parsley." He's very good and tolerant to religion whenever it comes in his way; for he detests bigotry of any sort, even the bigotry of the Freethinkers. He himself is terribly open to conviction upon every subject.'

'I suppose by "parsley" he means the Christian religion?'

'Yes, and all the other religions that profess to dictate in an arbitrary manner to mankind, saying, "This alone is the true faith." He looks upon personal religion as purely constitutional; and, though he is such a very religious man, he can't take in all the beliefs of other people any more than he can always eat the same food as they do.'

'I see; and even in the choice of his bodily food, I think you told me, he differed a little from the rest of us?'

‘Yes, he is almost entirely a vegetarian. He very strongly objects to destroying animal life, in order that we may support our own lives by it, when there are other means of doing so. Above all, he dislikes the idea of turning the sufferings of animals into a sport. I believe this is the Buddhist theory; Coleridge’s ballad of the *Ancient Mariner* is founded on it. You remember the curse that followed upon the killing of the albatross for mere idle sport?’

‘I always thought the poem very much overrated,’ answered the young man. ‘I am glad to know that it possesses a hidden significance. And so your father consults the Great Prophet on religious matters as well as upon politics?’

‘He believes,’ said Sophy, ‘that Asia is the cradle of all religions possessed of vitality—Christianity amongst the number—and that only Easterns who are learned in mysticism are at all capable of inventing religions. Europeans, he says, being positivists, can form laws and political codes, but they are incapable of taking Oriental metaphors and poetic phrases in the proper spirit. He fancies that the European mind has taken several of these much too literally—the apple, for instance, the snake, and the creation of the world in six days; and he thinks that, in order to restore the proper proportion of poetry and prose, mystics and positivists ought to mingle together and interchange their ideas.’

‘I think,’ remarked Godfrey, ‘that the time has almost come when I ought to make your father’s acquaintance. I could represent the European element.’

‘Oh, I wish you would!’ exclaimed Sophy, warmly, and losing all feeling of shyness for the moment. ‘But how is it to be managed?’

‘I must leave that to you; try and arrange it, if you can.’

‘I will, indeed!’ cried she, enthusiastically. ‘Let me consider;’ and, leaning her chin upon her hands, she remained silent for some moments, as though in the act of developing a scheme.

‘I think I have discovered a way,’ she said at last, ‘though my plan may seem to you rather complicated, and not quite straightforward; but it is the only one I can think of.’

‘Never mind that,’ replied the young man. ‘Let me hear what it is.’

‘Well, then,’ rejoined Sophy, feeling now brave as a lion, ‘to-day is Thursday. Every Tuesday morning, as it is market-day, Janus and Nelus go down to Southerbourne in the cart, and when it is fine, my father and I nearly always go too—I fancy it does him good to have a little sea-air; and when it was warm weather I used to bathe. Anyhow, we have got into the habit of going there upon this particular day, for then Janus can ask my advice about the things she buys; and we then put our purchases into the cart, and drive home all together before nightfall.’

‘Quite in patriarchal fashion,’ remarked Godfrey. ‘Well, and what then?’

‘Whilst Janus and I are doing our shopping, and Nelus is attending to the horses, what do you think my father does?’ Sophy inquired.

‘I can’t imagine,’ answered Godfrey, smiling at her enthusiasm. ‘Though, if it wouldn’t offend you, I should say, “probably something very extraordinary.”’

‘This great, good, and clever man,’ she continued, for she still boasted of her father’s wisdom to others, although she had sometimes felt doubtful about it

herself—‘this man, whom other *still wiser men* will come half across the world to see, who advises kings and emperors and prime ministers, and makes war and peace just as he likes—actually sits down quietly upon the beach and eats shrimps!’

‘And it is then that I am to be introduced to him?’ asked Godfrey, looking amused.

‘It is then that you must introduce *yourself*. You must go up to him and plunge into conversation. You will recognise him from my description; besides which, you tell me you have seen him at a distance. I will tell you also to what part of the beach I will lead him, and then it will all go off beautifully.’

‘But in what way am I to begin the conversation? Won’t he naturally think it very impertinent of an utter stranger to address him?’

‘Oh, no, indeed he won’t!’ answered Sophy, eagerly. ‘As he is quite unlike other people, he isn’t governed by ordinary rules. He’s always on the look-out for “types,” “counterparts,” “idiosyncrasies,” “emanations,” “brain-structures,” and converts to the Great Cause. Directly he hears you speak he will like you,’ she added, blushing, ‘for he will like your voice.’

‘But what word is my voice to utter first?’

‘Oh, you might pretend not to know that he was blind, as he doesn’t show it; and you could ask him the time—he always wears a repeater.’

‘That is, I believe, a very common way of stealing a person’s watch. He will probably take me for a thief.’

‘Ah, how little you can grasp his innocent and unsuspecting nature! He’s a thousand times more likely to take a thief for an honest man, than an honest man for a thief: he never suspects *anybody*!’

And she sighed at several reminiscences which occurred to her connected with her father's floating fund of credulity.

'Well, and having asked the time?' Godfrey inquired.

'Then,' replied Sophy, 'you must immediately plunge into politics.'

'And into the politics of what country am I to plunge?' asked her cousin, laughing. 'Of course, too, all his views will be quite the reverse of mine. We shall probably end in a quarrel.'

'You must speak rather in the abstract,' explained Sophy, waving her hand with the old movement towards the setting sun. 'You had better talk about the balance of power in Europe, and the eventual triumph of the Tartar race; and, above all, be sure to crack up the Turks, and the Poles, and the Circassians.'

Godfrey laughed again at this piece of feminine strategy, and Sophy looked up at him inquiringly, uncertain as to whether he was not ridiculing both herself and her project.

'I am smiling,' he explained, 'at the notion of my going down to a provincial watering-place, and conversing upon subjects of which I am profoundly ignorant, with a man I have never spoken to before in my life, and who is eating shrimps and wishing me anywhere! I am relieved to find that he does not object to destroying the life of a shrimp.'

'A certain number of shrimps are destroyed every day, whether he eats them or not. I fancy this is the way he absolves his conscience. Besides which, I confess he is not altogether consistent. People expecting perfect consistency in him will be disappointed;

but I know that after you have spoken two words to him he will like you, so it doesn't much matter what those words are.'

'And would you be looking on at me all the time, confusing me with your presence?'

'No; I should be marketing with the servants. But after he had got thoroughly to know you and like you, I should appear upon the scene, and, lo and behold, it would then turn out that you were the son of his brother from whom he had been parted so long! After this, I think there might come a reconciliation; only I want him to form his own judgment of you first, before he knows who you are.'

'You mean, that if he knew my name he would be prejudiced against me? It seems very unnatural.'

'It does, indeed! And you don't know how much I have thought about it lately! Here are our two fathers living within barely three miles of each other, and never meeting or speaking! And all for some old quarrel which they ought long ago to have forgotten. Very likely they may have forgotten it, but they still remember their old bitterness. Really, I think that it's time they should be friends, and that *your* father, being the elder, ought to be the first to make advances.'

Sophy did not know, when she ventured upon this suggestion, that it might appear to her cousin in the light of an impertinence; but he somehow made her feel this, as he replied coldly,—

'My father is now a very old man. He will not be here much longer, and I endeavour to check myself whenever I am inclined to criticise or cavil at his actions.'

'Of course,' answered his companion, feeling crushed. 'Still, this family quarrel is a great pity.'

‘It is; but we mayn’t quite know the true cause of it.’

‘I don’t want to know it,’ said Sophy, ‘if to know would only set me against people! I’m sure I’m trying to do all in my power to patch it up by making friends with you; and yet I hardly like the idea of our being so much together, when my father has never known you or spoken to you. That’s why I want to bring about a meeting.’

‘Very well; I will do as you wish. Next Tuesday, if the day should be fine, I’ll ride down early to Southerbourne; and, at about twelve, I’ll be on the beach opposite to where the bathing-machines used to be in the summer.’

‘Thank you, thank you, a thousand times! How kind you are!’ And she then added, anxious to disabuse his mind of a possible misconception, ‘Of course I don’t say that my father would object to our meeting, although, somehow, till the quarrel is made up, I haven’t liked to tell him about it. He didn’t mind it when we were children, neither does he object to my walking about with Tom Hickathrift; so the only reason why he might not like me to walk with you would be on account of this tiresome feud.’

‘Do you walk about much with Tom Hickathrift?’ asked the young man—the *real Godfrey* looking out for one moment from his eyes, and seeming not over-well pleased.

‘Not quite so much since Sir Peckham’s death,’ she answered; ‘for he has such heaps of things to attend to now, that he can’t give me so much of his time.’

‘He gave you a great deal of it, then, once?’

‘Yes,’ replied Sophy, simply. ‘And I miss him

now a good deal; for it's always nice to see the people one likes.'

'It must be very nice! When I saw your manner to Hickathrift at the Abbey ball, do you know what I thought?'

'No; do tell me!'

'Well, I thought that you were probably engaged to be married to him. I was very nearly congratulating you.'

How calmly he said it, as if he did not in the least care whether she was engaged to be married or not! After all, what difference could it possibly make to him? Nevertheless, his manner depressed and irritated her, and the crimson blood mounted unconsciously to her cheek.

'But I was glad to hear, next day,' he went on impassively, 'that my impression was erroneous.'

'And why should I not be engaged to be married if I like?' she demanded, warmly, goaded almost to madness.

'There is no reason in the world,' Godfrey answered, crushing her still further by his calmness. 'You are not, however, I believe? I was wrong, of course, to judge from appearances, as it was your first ball.'

'Did I do anything so very extraordinary that you should know at once that it was my first ball?' she asked, now fairly put out.

'I fancied that it was,' he answered, 'by several little things; besides, I think you told me.'

'You can't have been, yet, to a *very great many* yourself!'

This was intended as a cutting sarcasm, though, as she gave vent to it, she wondered at her own extraordinary temerity.

‘No ; we are neither of us very old !’ he answered, laughing good-humouredly. ‘But that is a fault that is certain to mend.’

‘Now I must indeed go home,’ cried Sophy, unable to account for her own irritation, as she rose suddenly from her seat upon the fallen oak-tree. ‘It’s getting almost dark.’

Godfrey rose also, and stood over her in the twilight. He held both her hands in his for some time before he let them go. In Sophy’s heart so many conflicting emotions had arisen during this short interview, with the last of which there had mingled, somehow, such a feeling of forlornness, that she almost imagined that Godfrey, like some powerful and all-seeing genius, had divined its existence, and was about to take her to his heart. A great wish came over her to be comforted, absolved, forgiven, for she knew not what. Instead of this, however, he raised her hand respectfully to his lips, with something of the formal gesture of a gallant of the *ancien régime*, and, without looking back at him, she hurried homewards through the gloaming.

Godfrey stood watching her thoughtfully until she was lost in the darkness, and then, with something very like a sigh, he vaulted over the five-barred gate, and made for Great Stillingfleet.

Sophy, in the meantime, was suffering keenly from that mortifying sense of inferiority which always tormented her in the presence of her cousin, and she began to count over in her mind the list of her imaginary iniquities—her awkwardnesses, her want of tact, her slips of the tongue, her provincialisms, her foolish tell-tale blushes, and what she was pleased to call her ‘barbarisms.’

‘I suppose,’ she thought, sadly and penitently, ‘that I’m only a sort of wild woman of the woods, and can’t do better—a savage, a kind of Orson in petticoats; and yet I never feel stupid or countrified when I’m with poor dear Tom! *Then* I can go rattling on without ever stopping to pick my words, and, somehow, I always seem to say the right ones! If only Godfrey would not speak to me as if I was either very young, or very poor, or very much beneath him, I should feel so much more at my ease, and *I shouldn’t dislike him half so much!* Next time I see him I will try to be brave, and put aside all this foolishness.’

As she flitted along the gravel-walk in front of the bay-window, within which stood the three suits of armour—empty now of all knighthood, mere shells, like those of absorbed ichneumon flies, yet bearing no outward trace of the death that had been so busy within—she saw, by the lights in the inner sitting-room, that the Great Prophet had already arrived; for when Mr. St. Clair was alone, he was accustomed to dispense with light, declaring that he could see better in the dark, and thinking, perhaps, that candles would be wasted upon one who could not even see the sun.

Sophy slipped in at the front-door, hung up her hat and cloak in the hall, and passed into the front sitting-room, in order to arrange the books upon the table, and clear away her knitting-needles and worsted-balls. The door of the inner sanctum was open as usual, but neither the Great Seer nor her father were aware of her presence; and before they perceived it, she could not avoid catching the following fragment of their conversation:—

The Great Prophet: ‘In a word, then, my friend,

be not over-anxious with regard to this matter, nor imagine that evil consequences must necessarily follow the union of cousins of the first degree, or that of those bound, within certain restrictions, by the tie of blood, a tie which we have ever held to be still further fortified and cemented by the additional tie of marriage, as marriage is confirmed and strengthened by an accompanying tie of blood. . . . The Circassians, the Turkomans, even the Jews, intermarry, and, indeed, all ancient races. To discountenance this was the invention of your priests, in order to give dispensations for which money is paid. . . . If these marriages are abominable, and against Nature, as would be the union of a brother with a sister, a son with his mother, why should the abomination depart upon the payment of money, as your priests pretend?’

Mr. St. Clair (bowing his head submissively): ‘I shall remember your words should I feel anxious again upon this subject; for if any man could convince me that I laboured under an error, that man would be yourself. Our prejudices, however, are more difficult to eradicate than our reasonable objections, and I must confess that I have always looked upon the marriages of cousins of the first degree as abominable.’

After hearing these words, poor Sophy slunk up to her room, feeling like a wounded spirit.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE more letter from Sophy to her chosen friend, and I have done, probably for ever, with the epistolary style:—

‘THE description of your unhappiness,’ she began, ‘has made me feel how much I have in my own life to make me grateful and contented. I am told that bodily pain, too, is very disagreeable, though I have never experienced it to any extent; and it does, indeed, seem hard that, on the top of everything else, you should have toothache. Console yourself, dear, with occupation, with the knowledge that things seldom go on for long exactly as they are, and with a belief in *the doctrine of compensation*. All these I have proved the truth of; the second of them, sometimes, quite in a tiresome way: for when one is well off and happy as one is, of course one has no wish for changes; and yet, somehow, either in circumstances or feelings, they always seem to come. I think I told you that the Prophet was coming to stay with us again—you know about him from my descriptions. The Great Cause, I believe, is entirely of his own invention; consequently we all sit at his feet and worship him, speaking of him as “Him”’ (written with a capital H). ‘He is an Asiatic mystic,’ she continued, going through the recognised formula, adding, by way of climax, as Mr. St. Clair invariably added, ‘He has dwelt with the Yezedis, or devil-worshippers, and witnessed their dark rites. . . . And now to tell you, dearest Adèle, a little characteristic trait respecting these Yezedis, which, I really think, gives one *a great insight into human nature*. . . It seems that these horrid creatures go through all sorts of dreadful religious ceremonies, worshipping the Spirit of Evil because they believe him to be much stronger than the Spirit of Good (as I should think *he was*, from all I hear, though, of course, this is no reason why they should try and conciliate him, throwing, as it were, sops to Cerberus;

but it seems this is their system). With people *here*, on the contrary, the Great Prophet says, things are exactly reversed. We are supposed to reverence *the Spirit of Good*, looking up to Him, and professing to do what would please Him most, though we don't always do it. But fancy, the Prophet says—and my father assures me that this is a fact—there are actually some people here, in England, who, because they fancy it looks *fine* and *fashionable* and *independent*, will positively pretend that they are worshipping and following the Spirit of Evil!—openly flaunting their sins in the eyes of other good people, not caring a bit for public opinion, and behaving in the most foolish and extravagant manner, endeavouring to shock everybody and trying to break as many commandments of the English religion (I really forget what they all are, but some are easier to keep, I believe, than others) as they possibly can! But now listen to the behaviour of these absurd Yezedis, and then you will see that men are really just as silly as we are, and, after all, very much alike in all countries. The people amongst them who wish to be thought smart and eccentric begin, of course, as they do here, by going against all the old-established forms. But how are they to display their fashionable wickedness? Not by *breaking* the commandments of the English religion, but by *keeping* them; so that actually the unorthodox people and the dissipated young men amongst the Yezedis set about doing good and scoffing at the *Spirit of Evil*, and they refuse to go to devil-worship and become what we should call quite virtuous, though only from contradiction! Of course, however, they are looked upon by their clergy as the wicked people are looked upon here—quite as pariahs; and they become, in a

kind of way, excommunicated, and the respectable Yezedis won't visit them, or invite their *females* to their balls or parties. But they go on swaggering in their lawless way *whilst they are young*, though, when they get near their end, they generally reform (as bad people do here), and become bloodthirsty devil-worshippers again, having "sown their wild oats." After this, dearest Adèle, can you wonder at any of the extravagances committed by men or women wherever they are?

'Besides all this, the Great Prophet talks a great deal about "atmospheres," "spheres," "emanations," "counterparts," &c.; for all his views upon every subject *stand by themselves*. I longed that your pretended sister could have listened to him the other day, as it is just the sort of stuff that would go down with her victims; and to the *deaf ones* it would sound so well through a trumpet. He tells me, too, that I am "a leader of men," and that I am meant by rights for a Priestess or a Prophetess.

'Our dinner-party of the other evening was what you would call "of the most original." It was got up entirely for our Asiatic star, and several of his disciples attended. We made up as many beds as we could in the house, and over the cart-horses, but for one night we were very much crowded. In the middle of our preparations, judge of our consternation when we heard that the Private Secretary of a *certain minister*, with whom the Great Prophet is at *daggers drawn* (at any rate *in print*), wished very particularly to make his acquaintance; and as he was staying at Southerbourne, he proposed to my father, who has known him for a long time, to drive over and meet him at dinner. Of course we didn't quite like to refuse this request,

though, I must say, I almost feared that the meeting might end in bloodshed; and I hid away, secretly, all the yataghans and tomahawks that are hanging up in the dining-room, and also the rifle, loaded with the golden bullet which never misses its mark (which, you remember, we cast one day in Wimpole Street), and I took care that the dinner-knives were all nice and blunt. As a little surprise to some of our Oriental guests, what do you think my dear father had devised? That we should have a real Eastern dish, called "Kebobs," and it seemed to him quite providential that Abdallah (who, as I told you, came over with the Arab horses) should be here to prepare it. I went into the kitchen during this painful operation, to see if I could pick up any ideas; but the only effect of my visit was, to make me feel that I would rather starve than eat of the horrible dish. This is the way it was made, though, if anybody says *it isn't*, please don't quote me; for I really don't see why a *common donkey-boy* (and this is all Abdallah is in his own country) should know anything about cooking. My father seems to think, however, that because he comes from the East he must know all about Eastern cookery, as if any one would ever be so deluded as to believe in the culinary talents of a donkey-boy of the North! Abdallah, then, who can only speak his own language, and that badly, made imperious signs, first of all, that he wanted a leg of mutton, which was brought to him by Janus, who looked very much disgusted at having her province invaded by what she calls a "barbarium." After this he made her understand that he required some little pieces of stick. These he sharpened with his pocket-knife, and having cut up the leg of mutton, with the same knife, into pieces *about the size of a lump*

of sugar, he put each of them upon one of the little pointed skewers. He then commenced cutting up some onions. I think I told you before that Abdallah has a very bad cold, and this seemed to make it far worse—his eyes cried dreadfully, and a long red pocket-handkerchief with yellow spots, which he carried in his hand, seemed to be trailing into everything, though he didn't use it half so often as he ought. It was really dreadful to watch him, and to think that *human beings* were destined to eat what he was mauling about in this awful manner! When he had cut up the onions, he threw them into a saucepan with the lumps of mutton and some rice, and stirred them about for some time, whilst Janus glared at him most ferociously. Now and then he took up a tallow-candle and held it over the saucepan, to see how they were getting on, and from holding it so very near to the fire, a good deal of the tallow couldn't help falling into the *kebobs*. The whole thing was very terrible; but when they were finished, and sent into the dining-room, they were pronounced to be excellent. Abdallah was sent for, and publicly complimented in his native language, and not one of the little horrors escaped with its life! The introduction of this Eastern dish, in fact, seemed to produce such a good effect upon the Great Prophet and the Private Secretary, that instead of quarrelling, as we had expected they would, they apparently became *friends for life*; and I shall be very much surprised if those violent articles directed against a *certain minister*, and accusing him of bribery and corruption, do not cease, at any rate for the present. What *was* remarkable, though, was, that two of the Prophet's own disciples, who had always been the most devoted friends, had a terrible dispute; not in the least upon an important subject,

but as to whether an Oriental dish called a *pillau* was composed of chicken and rice, or with *rice only*. They became black in the face with rage, foamed at the mouth, threatened each other, and shook their fists, swearing at the same time in *several languages*, and according to *three or four different religions*! One called the other the "son of the father of lies," whilst the other replied that he was "a fool," and that "nothing remained to him but to grow fat;" and in the end the Great Prophet and the Private Secretary had positively to tear them asunder! For the rest of the evening they didn't speak, and great fears are entertained lest the one who said that the *pillau* was made with *rice* should withdraw himself from the political party of the one who said that it was made with *chicken*, in which case (my father says) the Great Cause will lose the services of a man of *first-rate* brain-power, and all for such a very little thing! This will show you, that even great men are subject to certain weaknesses, which it is always a satisfaction for us, who are *only women*, to realise.

'And now farewell, my dearest Adèle, for my letter has grown to an enormous length; and but that you said letters were a consolation to you, I should feel ashamed to send it. I wish you the good fortune to escape from your complications, and that with all speed. I have not alluded to any complications of my own, but will only tell you that I have had lately some *very sad thoughts*. Had I the prayer-wheel of the Buddhists, I think I know what I should pray for; and they say that it is a great thing to know what one really wants, as very few people do. My music and drawing are going on very nicely; but I'm afraid I don't make quite so much progress with *my*

religion, as I am met at every turn by such terrible contradictions and deceptions. However, I cannot really say with truth that I have as yet taken it thoroughly in hand.'

Here the letter ended with a few affectionate compliments, which, as it turned out, Sophy might have spared herself the trouble of inditing; for, to her surprise, the whole composition was returned to her in a few days, fortunately unopened, with a note from the 'pretended sister,' to the effect that Adèle had mysteriously disappeared, and that, by no manner of means, could her whereabouts be discovered.

Letters continued, nevertheless, to arrive for her from Mr. Carver, and as no more were delivered in what Sophy had decided was the handwriting of the 'second husband,' she endeavoured to subdue her rising anxiety, concluding, with a wisdom beyond her years, that it would be perhaps more reasonable, until further particulars reached her, to look upon this 'mysterious disappearance' in the light of an elopement, rather than a case of suicide.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT all this time the great Hickathrift ring of betrothal had been jingling about in Sir Thomas's waistcoat-pocket, and he was looking forward with mingled feelings of fear and excitement to the moment when he should rid himself of it in one way or another; for, supposing Sophy refused him, it was to be returned to his mother's forefinger.

Upon the occasion of his last visit to Little Stilling-

fleet, when, to the surprise of its unconscious object, he had seemed to ignore her very existence, he had ventured to make known his feelings to her father, and had endeavoured to obtain from him some inkling of what might be his possible fate; for he had the candour to admit that he was himself in a terrible state of uncertainty.

‘I can’t help thinking that it’s rather too soon to speak to her,’ he had said ruefully. ‘But yet, what is one to do? If I put it off some one else may propose first, and then, you know, one will feel like a fool.’

‘I hardly think you need have any fears on *that* score,’ answered Mr. St. Clair. ‘For I don’t see who there is to propose. My visitors here are, nearly all of them, men older than myself—most of them are foreigners, and they are too much occupied to think of the allurements of love. Besides which, they belong mostly to a religion which, though it denies the existence of more than one God, sanctions a plurality of wives; and it would no doubt be considered indecorous in a country where this rule is reversed—that is to say, where three Gods, and only one wife, are permitted—were I to give my child in marriage to a follower of Islam.’

‘Of course,’ replied the young man, ignoring the theological portion of this remark. ‘I’m not much afraid of those you mention; but there are other people. . . . She was very much admired at the ball. . . . There’s Godfrey St. Clair. . . .’

‘That can *never* be!’ cried Sophy’s father, with animation. ‘They are first cousins. But that is only one of several reasons why I should be strongly opposed to such a marriage.’

‘I don’t say there’s any just reason for my fear,’

rejoined Tom. 'But a fellow always *is* a little frightened when he feels as I do.'

'Yes, and very naturally. We have most of us travelled by the same road. And that reminds me—since you have made me this confidence of your feelings, I feel that *I*, too, should not be justified in keeping anything back. . . . You know about her mother?'

'I do,' replied Tom, touched and embarrassed by the thought of the honourable feeling which prompted the elder man thus to disinter his past. 'At least, I think I know all that you could tell me.'

'That is well,' said the philosopher. 'And I ought to have known you too well to suppose that, even had you been ignorant till now of the history of my youth, your feelings would have changed towards *her* at any disclosures I might make to you.'

'Spare yourself the pain, sir,' interrupted Tom eagerly. 'I know her mother was a gipsy; but I love her as much as if she had been a queen's daughter.'

'Her mother was an angel,' said the blind man, deeply touched at this heartfelt speech. 'And were she alive now, neither you nor her daughter would be ashamed of one of the most charming of women. But there are still circumstances of which you may, perhaps, be ignorant, and of which I feel that it is my duty to inform you. . . . Sophy has other relations. My wife's supposed father, a wild, lawless man, who ill-treated her in her childhood, imagines that on account of my marriage he has claims upon me. It has been with the utmost difficulty that I have succeeded in keeping this unprincipled person—one Reuben Goddard by name—at bay; for it is natural that I should wish to avoid shocking Sophy's gentle

and refined nature by allowing her to come in contact with one so lost to all elevating impulses, but who is yet unfortunately bound to her by the tie of blood.'

'I can't tell you how right I think you,' exclaimed Tom warmly; 'for she would feel it, of course. It would make her very unhappy, I'm sure it would.'

'But it makes no difference to you?' asked the blind man, with satisfaction in his voice.

'I'm sorry for it, of course, and for all the annoyance it must have caused you; but I don't see how it affects me personally, except that I know now that she's more in want of a second protector than I thought.'

'You're a good fellow,' said Mr. St. Clair, feeling for Tom's hand and pressing it; 'and, whichever way it turns, you will know that you have my best wishes from the first.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied the young man gratefully, and for a few seconds both were silent. Francis St. Clair was the first to speak.

'This misguided individual,' he said, 'has received from me, through my lawyer, a small annual allowance, not sufficient to support him in idleness without some effort on his own part to augment it, and yet enough to protect him from absolute want. It is a sum which will seem to you ridiculously small—forty pounds only; but I was advised to give no more. I was also recommended by my legal adviser to make him understand that even this paltry sum would cease with my life; for he had fancied that it might have been still further increased by a bequest, and it is unwise to give a man of no principle an interest, however small, in one's death.'

'Indeed, yes!' Tom answered, guessing his meaning, yet feeling, notwithstanding, no diminution in his

devotion to the unconscious granddaughter of this monster. 'Has he ever actually threatened you?'

'Not in a way that has alarmed me for my personal safety; and, indeed, this has seemed to me but of small account compared to the annoyance and grief which Sophy would experience should this person present himself at the house and reveal his kinship. During my lifetime I think I have rendered this improbable by a counter-threat that, from the day of such an occurrence, his allowance shall cease; but I don't think it impossible that, after my death, he may cause Sophy and her husband some trouble. *You*, my dear Tom, will know now how to shield her from this; and I should advise some arrangement similar to the one I have made.'

When Tom Hickathrift heard himself spoken to thus, as the future husband of Sophy, he experienced a sudden and delightful thrill of emotion. This dream, then, seeming to him almost too delicious to be realised, was to Mr. St. Clair a possibility, nay, a probability even. For some moments he could not trust himself to reply, and the father of Sophy continued,—

'There is one other circumstance which I feel that I ought perhaps to mention to you, as some persons may possibly attach importance to it. My daughter, as you know, has always been called "*Sophia*," or "*Sophy*," a word signifying *Wisdom*, which, as you may have heard, was her mother's name; and, as though with a view of embodying this virtue, she has hitherto certainly displayed a knowledge, an intelligence, a keenness of perception, extraordinary in one so young.'

'There's nobody like her!' exclaimed Sir Thomas, with enthusiasm. 'She's cleverer, and nicer, and prettier, than any one else in the world!'

'But this name,' Mr. St. Clair continued, 'given to her at a moment when my life became suddenly darkened, when we were sojourning for a while in the city of Sophia, her birthplace, was not bestowed upon her in a church; nor has she, in fact, ever received baptism, in the usual sense of the word.'

'Indeed!' returned Tom, looking rather blank, though even now his heart remained loyal.

'Of course this omission can at any moment be remedied,' the Agnostic went on; 'and she will now have the rare advantage of being able to select the religious denomination with which she may desire to become associated—if with any.'

'Yes, of course,' acquiesced the young man. He could not help, however, feeling a little uncomfortable. Like the typical French hero of melodrama, he immediately thought of his mother, and what she would say to this 'omission.'

'Perhaps I can take her off and get her christened somewhere abroad,' he thought at length, and at this he felt comforted.

'And now, before we part company,' said Mr. St. Clair, 'let me tell you how flattered and honoured I feel that my daughter's hand should have been demanded of me by an honest man. Thank you, my dear Tom; I say again you have my best wishes. I know nothing, however, of Sophy's feelings respecting marriage; but I think I may say, without raising false hopes, that she has always had a warm affection for you, and looked upon you as one of her best friends, as I hope you will continue to be, whatever happens.'

'I will, indeed, sir,' said Tom; 'to the end of my days—whether I win or lose.'

At this speech Mr. St. Clair became visibly affected.

He again felt for his companion's right hand, and, when they met, the two hands clasped each other very cordially, whilst with his left the 'young Sir Tummus' felt nervously for the great Hickathrift ring, which he had brought with him in his waistcoat-pocket.

'I think I would rather get it over pretty soon,' he remarked, after some moments of reflection. 'It will be a weight off my mind. I'll ride over on Monday next and ask her.'

And, indeed, the possession of this hereditary jewel was beginning to seem to him like a care and a responsibility, and he felt that he must get rid of it somehow for the sake of his peace of mind.

Finally it was arranged, that on the following Monday he should ride over, as he had so often done before, as though by accident; that he should send back his horse; that Sophy (as *she*, too, had often done before) should accompany him upon part of his homeward way; and that during this walk she should be informed of his intentions.

However, when Monday arrived he did not present himself as had been agreed upon. A note from him was sent over instead, which Sophy read aloud to her father, and wherein (for he had felt sure this would happen by reason of Mr. St. Clair's blindness) the young man made no allusion to the object of his intended visit. He did, however, go so far as to say this much, which might have seemed to her to be somewhat mysterious, had not her mind been filled with other thoughts and projects:—

'When I tell you the reason that I have not kept my appointment you will laugh at me, and I shall deserve it. I set out, and was half way on the road, when I came across *one magpie*; and fancying I might be out

of luck I turned back and went home again.' And he then added, that unless the same evil omen appeared to him on the following day, Tuesday, he hoped to present himself then instead.

'Poor dear Tom!' exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, as Sophy put down the letter. 'He's a perfect type of a true-hearted young Englishman; and what is more, he is a gentleman.'

'A better creature never breathed,' she answered carelessly, as she tore the note into little pieces, and flung it into the grate. To the blind man these words seemed almost as ominous as Tom's magpie.

'I hope, with all my heart, that she likes him,' he murmured to himself; 'but I'm afraid.'

On Tuesday Sophy rose with the lark; for it was the day upon which she had arranged her little seaside project with Godfrey, and she felt unusually restless and excited. The painful impression produced by her father's words upon the subject of the union of first cousins, had gradually subsided before the joyful expectation of this meeting with her youthful kinsman, which was to result, she fondly hoped, in a perpetual 'burying of the hatchet.'

Whether or no she had ever really asked herself how this enthralling friendship was to end; whether she had looked on into the future, and seen Godfrey and herself united by closer ties than those of a sentimental companionship, despite the objections of a beloved and affectionate father; or whether she contemplated the possibility of abandoning for ever such sweet communion, and beholding him married to another, whilst living thus within a stone's-throw of his ancestral oaks and beeches, I must leave it to my readers to conjecture. Those amongst them who are

the most conversant with the impulsive and unreasoning minds of the young will, no doubt, come to the conclusion that she had probably cast all fears for the future to the winds, and resigned herself blindly to the alluring tangibilities of the present.

The day was wonderfully fine for the time of year—autumnal, rather than wintry. The dew lay thick and white on the lawn, in the long morning shadows, which stretched across it, as if to shake hands; but there was no real frost. The Dallingridge woods looked blue and hazy in the distance; but though the season was so far advanced, they were as yet undespoiled of their foliage, owing to the dry weather; and the nearer copses glowed with warm russet tints, from amongst which a primrose-coloured birch-tree or orange sycamore stood out here and there in brilliant relief.

As Sophy looked out at this scene, two squirrels darted across the lawn; the birds were chirping as blithely as if it had been spring-time, and everything seemed replete with beauty and freshness, rendered all the more touching from its contrast with that which was inevitably to follow—the frozen sleep of winter.

‘What a delicious day!’ she thought, as she leant out of her bedroom window and drank in the crisp air, and, contrary to her usual custom, she began considering what dress she should wear.

‘I think my shepherd’s plaid,’ she decided at last. ‘My other two frocks he has seen so very often.’ And she set about making her simple toilet.

Sophy had not slept from a nervous fear of bad weather, for there had been three hoarfrosts running, which are generally supposed to be forerunners of rain. She looked, however, extremely well, notwithstanding;

and she entered the breakfast-room, where her father was sitting, seeming like a concentrated and incorporate essence of youth, beauty, and happiness.

‘Why are you looking so sentimental?’ she inquired, as she kissed him loudly and affectionately, for she had surprised him in what appeared to be a ‘brown study.’ ‘Why should your dear brow wear a cloud when there isn’t one in the whole sky the size of a feather? But, ah, I forgot!’ she added, checking herself reproachfully; ‘you can’t see what a most lovely day it is!’

‘I can feel it though,’ he replied. ‘I knew at once that it was bright and sunny.’

‘O Janus, Janus!’ she continued, rattling on, for she felt that she must give some manner of expression to her gladness of heart. ‘Again here is the accursed flesh of swine, in the form of bacon, dear; of course you won’t eat any; but here are three poached eggs, all hard, but one not broken; some rice-milk, honey, and a muffin. What will you begin with?’ and she placed a cup of steaming coffee by the side of the blind man’s plate.

‘Thanks; I don’t feel much inclined to eat this morning,’ answered Mr. St. Clair, who did not seem to be in the enjoyment of his usual unruffled calm. ‘A little coffee and some toast will be enough for me.’

‘The sea-air will soon make you as hungry as an ogre,’ remarked his daughter, who was now, like Werther’s ‘Charlotte,’ cutting bread-and-butter in the most conscientious and determined manner, as though to exhaust some of her superabundant energy. ‘And the less you eat now, the more appetite you will have for those delicious *shrimps*. I’m sure I’m very glad we’ve got such a fine day for our expedition.’

'We are not going to Southerbourne to-day,' said Mr. St. Clair, quietly. 'I have just told Jane and Nelus.'

'*Not going to Southerbourne!*' echoed Sophy, dropping, in her consternation, the heavy knife with which she had been attacking the home-made loaf, and seeming suddenly to become cold, and limp, and disconsolate.

'No, dear—don't you remember? you read me his letter—Sir Thomas Hickathrift is coming to-day.'

'Oh, is that all?' exclaimed Sophy with a sigh of relief, the colour coming back to her cheeks. 'How formal and grand we are! Then "Sir Thomas Hickathrift" won't find the family at home, that'll be all!

'My dearest Sophy!' said the blind man, and she remarked that his thin hand trembled, and that his cheek was unusually pale, 'I delight in your happy, joyous nature. . . . I shall miss it, my child, when you are no longer with me; so don't think I am checking you if I say that I hope for once you will treat Tom seriously, and listen to what he has got to say.'

'How do you mean?' she asked, painfully impressed by his manner. 'What can Tom have to say to me that won't keep? or,' she added, blushing, as she divined the truth, 'that I don't know perfectly well already?'

'Perhaps, dear, you *did* know it; *I* knew it, most of our friends knew it, and so why should not you? However, Tom must speak for himself. I did not even mean to say this much . . .'

'I do think it will keep,' said Sophy, nervously. 'I'm afraid I know what he may be going to say; but he can say it some other time.'

'My dear child, how could I guess that you attached so much importance to going to Southerbourne? Last

week you seemed so provoked at having to go. It was a day such as I imagine this one to be, and you said—I remember your words, because they struck me as being so true—“Why should we go amongst horrid men and women, and houses and shops, to a town, when we can enjoy, in peace and quietness, one of the last fine days of a dying year?” Don’t you remember?”

‘I do,’ she answered, hanging her head and feeling abashed.

‘And now,’ her father went on, ‘I have as good as promised Tom that he shall speak to you to-day, and I hardly like to put him off. He is very anxious, and he may have nerved himself into saying to-day what he would not be able to say so well to-morrow. I know well the feeling myself.’

‘It doesn’t matter how well he says it!’ exclaimed poor Sophy, bursting into tears; ‘for I know that I could never, never bring myself to marry him!’

‘My dear child, I am indeed sorry; I had hoped that you cared for poor Tom a little.’

‘So I do,’ replied Sophy, between her sobs. ‘But that only makes it worse! A person I *hated* I could easily drive away; but to Tom, whom I like so much, but whom I could *never* marry, what *am* I to say?’

‘You will know best, dear; and you have enough tact to prevent him, if you like, from actually proposing to you. A woman can ward off these things in a thousand little ways, and yet avoid hurting a man’s feelings. You can be very kind, and at the same time *firm*; and when he sees which way the wind blows, he will pull up, for nobody likes to be refused.’

‘But why need I see him at all? Oh, do tell him about it; and let me get out of the way, and go down with the servants to Southerbourne!’

‘You may do this, if you like ; but you will please me better by facing what nearly every woman has to face at one time or another. I’m very sorry that you can’t feel differently.’

‘One would think that you wanted to get rid of me !’ exclaimed Sophy, with a touch of feminine irritation.

She was, indeed, torn and assailed by conflicting emotions, of which not the least disturbing was the thought that probably at about this time Godfrey St. Clair’s horse was being led round to the door of Dallingridge House, in order that he might start on his bootless errand. Tom Hickathrift’s inconsiderate behaviour seemed to her enough to provoke the patience of an angel.

‘When you say that, you *know* that your words have no meaning,’ answered the blind man, stroking her cheek. ‘But, as Tom says, one day you are sure to marry somebody ; and it would be an extraordinary piece of good luck for me if you didn’t go away further than the Abbey. If you lived there, I should have you with me at least now and then.’

‘You would probably have me with you all day,’ said Sophy, smiling through her tears ; ‘for I don’t think I could ever live in that gloomy old place, where the rooms are so large that I feel in them no bigger than a fly. I like nice, low, cosey-looking rooms like these ; and now they’ve been digging up a lot of stone coffins in the new kitchen-garden, and Tom told me, with pride, that they were going to arrange them as flower-stands at the top of the grand staircase! Fancy, how horrible ! Tom says there’s a hollow place scooped out in all of them for the monk’s head. . . .’

‘The system of interment in coffins very naturally

inspires disgust,' returned the philosopher, 'and yet, did one venture to express a desire that one's remains should be otherwise dealt with, I imagine that a great outcry would be raised, the keynote of which would be sounded by the parsons. But is this all you have to say against poor Tom?'

'His nose is so very long,' Sophy answered, the 'joke-on-the-scaffold' feeling obtaining a sudden ascendancy, 'and the shadow of it, which one sees sometimes on walls, and curtains, and things, is so ridiculous—it's longer still!' . . .

A slight cloud passed over the philosopher's Arab face at these words, which seemed to him to be more flippant than the occasion warranted.

'My dear child,' he remonstrated, 'if we could only plan out the arrangement of our own features—in itself a most subtle and mysterious thing; and yet, what is beauty but the harmonious setting of them together?—those amongst us who were possessed of good taste would, by a natural sequence, be as beautiful as houris. . . . The thing would find its level, though,' he added musingly, carried away by the subject; 'and it would not necessarily ensue that we should, in consequence, perceive a superabundance of beauty any more than we are conscious at present of a surfeit of good manners, becoming address, or appropriate costume. Then, as now, some vulgar persons would continue to make unpleasing combinations; and thus it would invariably happen that the most refined and sympathetic nature would be clothed in the most attractive garb.'

'You mean, I suppose, that the ignorant would choose their features as they choose their bonnets now, getting ugly ones and fancying them pretty? *Some*

people, however, are naturally beautiful, without any fine words, and with very few "garbs." . . . But then, apart from his own looks, Tom has such an absurd mother.'

'We can no more choose our parents than our features,' answered the blind man reproachfully.

'No, dear; but we can choose our *husbands*,' cut in Sophy.

'Tom is an honest man,' said Mr. St. Clair, without heeding this last sally.

'What temptation has he for stealing our family plate?' she answered flippantly, having now thoroughly recovered her good-humour, and bowing, as it were, before the inevitable. 'Nearly everybody is "*honest!*"'

During this discussion they had moved from the breakfast-room, and established themselves upon the red divan in the bay-window of the parlour, where the empty harness of the dead knights shut them off from the rest of the apartment.

'My belief is that Lady Hickathrift is less vulgar-minded than provincial,' Francis St. Clair continued. 'At any rate, she is thoroughly kind-hearted; so was poor old Peckham, too, in private life, though he was a fool, and, in his public career, a Tory of the most virulent and uncompromising type—a type which is fast disappearing, I am happy to say, from our midst before the march of modern progress. Neither of them had travelled at all, or lived much in London—that great leveller of castes—consequently they imbibed mistaken notions as to their own importance—very excusable in persons who

"Think of home

As one might think of it in some damp shire,
Where, tritons 'mongst the minnows of the mire,

Pand'ring to mouldy feudal sophistries,
 We say, 'All these
 Broad mortgaged lands are ours, yon 'scutcheon'd hall,
 Bright with their banners who were lords of all,
 Here, where we also reign, all these are ours.
 From postern-towers
 Read how, of old, the wingèd arrows sped
 From archers, then our vassals; overhead,
 Ours is the flag which dominates with pride
 The country-side.'"

You remember those lines? . . . Now Tom has none of this nonsense about him.'

'He's certainly not proud or stuck up, but *he knows he's a Hickathrift*,' answered Sophy, nodding her head with a movement implying conviction.

'It would be odd if he did *not* know it, when one considers how it must have been drummed into him from his earliest childhood; but I consider that he's quite wonderful for an only son. His father, too, I must say, behaved to me always with consistent friendliness; and this is more than I can say of all our country neighbours. When, at the last election, for instance, I declined to vote, disagreeing, as I did, so thoroughly with either party . . . '

'How like you to disagree with everybody!' exclaimed Sophy. 'That's one of your chief charms; for you do it in such a gentle, quiet way, that no one could possibly be angry; and yet we all know that you think the whole world in the wrong, and that you are for doing away with everything!'

'I can say, with a clear conscience, that I have always tried to be just,' answered the philosopher.

'I know that,' said his daughter, as she patted his head, affectionately. 'We all know that you *try* to

be just, and, once or twice, I have discovered that you really *were* !’

‘You think me an old fool.’

‘No, dear, I don’t. I think you an old darling, and a real genius, but with hardly a single grain of common sense. Common sense, however, is such a tiresome, unpleasant thing, coming out, as it always does, at wrong times, and putting an end to so many nice enjoyments, that I’m quite glad to think that you are so entirely without it.’

‘How fortunate that my daughter inherits none of my weak points!’

‘I am happy to say that I inherit them all, but my defects are never active at the same time that yours are. I never feel so sensible as when you are foolish, or so practical as when you are wool-gathering; and in this way we manage to get on pretty well.’

‘Well, I hope you will be sensible now,’ said her father, in an impressive voice; ‘and be *kind*, at any rate’ for he fancied that, if not now, at least at some future day, Sophy might become Thomas Hickathrift’s wife, if only she could abstain from wounding his *amour propre*.

‘I will be as kind as you like,’ replied Sophy resignedly; ‘and I will do all I can to be sensible: but I can’t marry him. I shall not marry at all, or else I shall do like my mother before me, and marry *for love*: though there is no reason why I should be quite so fortunate as a beautiful young lady of great family.’

‘No good fortune could have equalled her deserts,’ answered the philosopher, sadly. ‘And perhaps now it would be as well to mention to you,’ he continued, in an altered tone, ‘that your mother (in the finite comprehension of those persons who wrongly consider

individual or family position to be superior to the more imperative claims of *race*) was not apparently of either great or influential ancestry, although of course, to those who think as we do, the humblest shepherd-boy, descending (let us say) from one of the ancient Scottish clans, appears to be by far more illustrious than the wealthiest of English or Irish *parvenus*, who, upon the strength, perhaps, of a Scotch title and acquired possessions (and of these there are several living examples), has the audacity to sport the three feathers and to set up a piper.'

'Of course,' rejoined Sophy, unable, upon the spur of the moment, to divine the meaning of this somewhat involved speech.

Before, however, she had time to inquire further, the keen ear of the blind man detected a distant sound, and, upon glancing towards the carriage-road, which wound down, serpent-like, to the house, unobscured by the new avenue (so new, as yet, that every tree was protected by a 'cradle'), she perceived the figures of two advancing horsemen. The foremost of these she knew at once to be her unwelcome suitor; another moment, and she heard the sharp twang of the garden-gate, and before she had time to realise to what extent her own particular 'plot' was 'thickening,' a smart-looking groom, in deep mourning, mounted upon a spanking chestnut, rode briskly up to the front door, making the gravel tingle against the windows as he passed.

Sir Thomas Hickathrift followed in a couple of seconds. He had already dismounted, and was leading his horse; but he handed the reins to his servant as soon as Jane opened the door.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Sir Thomas Hickathrift came into the room he somehow seemed to Sophy to be unlike his former self. His former self had never confused or tormented her, and the fact that he was doing so now made him appear to her in the light of a stranger, though it also invested him with a certain borrowed dignity, causing her to feel a little afraid of him. She became very cold as he grasped her hand, whilst he, too, looked pale and agitated, and she thought that neither his pallor nor his agitation was at all becoming. The air of honest candour, which made the charm of his countenance, was effaced for the moment; the faithful retriever eyes seemed to shrink from meeting her own; and one might almost have fancied that the depression visible in his usually upright figure was caused by the size of the family feature, which appeared to be weighing him down.

When a woman discovers, for the first time, that a man, for whom she experiences only a sisterly affection, regards her with feelings not by any means platonic, and desires, moreover, to give expression to these feelings with a view to appropriating her wholly and solely, to the sudden exclusion of all the roving fancies which may have made the excitement and romance of her free maidenhood, she very naturally passes through a strange revulsion of feeling. Nay, often, to her own surprise, her former comrade becomes almost repulsive to her; for the sisterly love, being dispelled by him, crumbles, as it were, to dust and ashes, whilst in this strange love she can take no part; and hence it is that an old friend may become suddenly transformed into a

new adversary, whom it seems her duty to combat and put to confusion.

Such an adversary, in the person of Thomas Hickathrift, seemed to be standing before Sophy now, and she commenced looking to her arms of defence. Perhaps, however, amongst the many conflicting emotions which possessed her, one of the most painful was occasioned by the thought that he might never henceforth be to her the friend and comrade he had been before, and that, unless she could ward off the fatal words which he had come on purpose to say, she must experience for the future constraint and embarrassment in the presence of the very person with whom she had felt, till now, so thoroughly at her ease.

Tom had evidently come to luncheon, which was not until two o'clock; and as it was now only one, she foresaw that the time would drag heavily until then. As a means of hastening the moments, and also to satisfy a longing which tormented her, she decided that she would retire to her room and write a few lines to Godfrey explanatory of her absence from Southerbourne.

This would give Tom an opportunity, too, of speaking privately to Mr. St. Clair; and who knew if he might not dissuade her 'braw wooer' from making an attempt which would be certain to end in failure?

Her letter did not take her long, although she first of all made a rough copy of it, in order that it should be perfect in form and orthography; both of which, however, were simple enough. It ran as follows:—

'MY DEAR GODFREY,—I have been extremely disappointed at having been prevented from fulfilling my little scheme for making you acquainted with my father; unpleasant circumstances, over which I had no control, having obliged us

to give up going, as usual, to Southerbourne. You have had, however, a beautiful morning for your ride, which I am glad of. Probably, at this moment, you are wandering about looking for us upon the beach. I fancy I can see you. Good-bye.—From your affectionate cousin,

‘SOPHY.’

As she completed these words—painful by reason of their truthfulness—she pushed aside the letter, and, bowing her head upon her hands, gave vent to a few irrepressible tears. The thought that Godfrey was waiting, that she could not go to him, and that he could not know till the following day the reason of her absence, filled her with a sense of helpless misery, such as she had never experienced before. In a few minutes, however, she roused herself, looked in the glass, (as what woman will not, under what circumstances soever?) sealed up her letter, and took it to the kitchen, in order that she might slip it at once into the post-bag. Here she saw, with satisfaction, that the pheasant at the fire was very nearly roasted, whilst the cold beef from Sunday (the only thoroughly Christian institution at Little Stillingfleet, though rarely partaken of by the master of the house), was all ready upon the dresser, garnished with tufts of parsley. The death of this pheasant, like that of several others whose forms were from time to time suspended in the larder, had been represented to the ‘semi-vegetarian’ as purely accidental.

‘Dang me, missy, if he didn’t goo fur to git clammed all along of’s own self!’ Nelus had explained, as he displayed the bird, a fine cock-pheasant, of magnificent plumage.

‘Poor creature! how very dreadful! How often this has happened lately!’ ‘missy’ had made answer,

condoning the white lie as she darted a significant glance at her fellow-poacher.

'As the vital spark is extinct,' remarked the philosopher, 'which no man living has yet learned how to reanimate, and as we are not responsible for its extinction, we may as well have him roasted for luncheon on Tuesday.'

And he was in the course of being roasted now, having been confided in his last moments of cooking to the care of Abdallah, who was seated, as Sophy thought, unpleasantly near to the bird, with his face swathed in a large yellow bandanna; for, on the top of his other ailments, he was now suffering from an attack of toothache.

'It's only a letter I wanted to put into the bag,' Sophy explained. 'How is his cold?' and she indicated the 'barbarium' with a movement of her hand.

'It's cough, it be a deal looser, it be,' replied Jane. 'But 'tis a sufferin' turrible with the toothache be sure, it be! Nelus hev put a hot onion into both of the earn on un, he hev, and we can't goo fur to do no moor, not if he wur our feller-creetur, we can't!'

The married life of Nelus and his mature better-half, had turned out to be a singularly happy one. Besides the child which had arrived upon the scene before the legal union of its parents (now a buxom maiden of nearly fourteen, called Delia, or 'Deely,' 'for short'), and the baby, whose christening had been celebrated so soon afterwards, there were five other thriving olive-branches, undistinguishable one from another by reason of their absurd family likeness, bespeaking on the part of the mother an absolute want of the imaginative faculty. These children were known to the philosopher and his daughter by the comprehensive appellation of 'the brats,' and it had been

arranged that they should be relegated exclusively to the strawyard, where 'Deely' used to look to them after a casual and desultory fashion. Upon rainy days, however, they were wont to descend upon the kitchen and out-buildings like a shower of frogs, where their crowing, pilfering, squalling, and fighting, frequently tried Sophy's patience to the very utmost. Upon the occasion of the advent of each one of these particular 'brats,' Mrs. Weller, the mother of Moses, had been used to come down from the upper regions of Great Stillingfleet, in order to minister to the requirements of Jane and the household in general, which was, nevertheless, put somewhat out of gear by these constantly-recurring episodes in the life of one who made its chief stay. Jane seemed now, however, to have grown into quite an old woman; she had lost nearly all her teeth, whilst her hair was replaced by a broad velvet band, upon which were tacked a row of dark-green ringlets made of a substance called 'mohair,' so that a casual observer might almost have imagined that Cornelius Ford, like the impetuous 'Spitfire,' had committed the imprudence of marrying his grandmother.

When Sophy returned to the sitting-room, and confronted once more the cause of her discomfort, she found him seated near her father in one of the window-seats. He rose, however, as she entered, and taking up his hat, went round to the stables to find out whether his groom had returned to the Abbey with the horses, according to his instructions, for it was agreed, as the reader is aware, that he should walk home.

'Am I to go with him all the same?' she asked, breathlessly, as soon as she found herself alone with her father.

'Nothing is changed,' he answered. 'He wishes

to do it to-day;' from which it may be inferred that Sir Thomas had met with the right number of magpies, and Sophy's heart sank within her, for she had foolishly hoped for a reprieve.

Tom was back again before she could make any further protestations, and there seemed to be nothing for it but to resign herself to her fate, and get the hated thing over as soon as possible. She was the first, therefore, after one of the gloomiest luncheons at which she had ever assisted, to propose that the young baronet should escort her as far as the cottage of the Stubberfields, which lay in his direct way home.

'I shall *hope*, dear,' Mr. St. Clair had said, pressing her hand, just before she set off; but his words seemed only to make her the more miserable.

By walking on very fast in front of her admirer, after the fashion of the rustic maidens observed by her in her childhood, she hoped, at first, to prevent him from touching upon the dreaded subject. She set off, therefore, at a brisk pace, picking out the cleanest part of the woodland way, between the two deep cart-ruts which were half full of water; so that, unless he risked splashing her unmercifully, he was forced to remain some way in the rear.

'How fast you walk!' he remonstrated, when they had reached the middle of the alder-wood.

'I fancied you could have kept up with me,' she answered, 'being so much taller. I feel rather cold, and wanted to get warm.'

'I've got my spurs on,' rejoined Sir Thomas. 'I forgot to take them off, and they bother me.'

'Can't you unbuckle them?' she asked; but, in a second, she bethought her that this operation would necessarily entail a halt, and that once they were both

at a standstill, the chances of a sentimental conversation would be greatly facilitated, so she added, hastily, with a little shiver,—

‘Oh no, never mind! I shall walk on briskly to the cottage, so as to be back as quickly as I can!’ and she set off again upon her impetuous way, poor Tom floundering after her, as before, afraid, by reason of the spongy condition of the ground, of approaching too near. Just as he was thinking that, perhaps, after all, it would have been better to have unbosomed himself between four walls, they came in sight of the black gate, upon the posts of which was nailed what remained of the head of the ‘Serene Highness.’ Sophy, too, became painfully aware of its vicinity, and to her horror she saw that it was closed. She knew well how difficult it always was to open—how it must be lifted and shaken, and how they would be constrained to stop close together during this performance, very likely with their hands touching. She foresaw that Tom would be unlikely to hurry over what would bring them into such close proximity, and, woman-like, she tried hastily to invent some subterfuge for getting through it as quickly as possible.

‘Oh, do make haste!’ she exclaimed, looking at her companion with a terrified expression. ‘I can’t bear to look at those horrid dead things—those cats’ heads, and stoats, and weasels! Do let us open it quickly!’ And with this she tried her hand at assisting Tom to lift up the gate with such a will that she actually succeeded in doing so. But in endeavouring to escape from her doom, she had only accelerated it. The tender heart of the young giant was lacerated at the sight of such superhuman exertions; he was honestly fearful lest she should strain herself, or inflict upon herself some bodily harm, and in proof of his anxiety

she felt his two hands closing suddenly upon her own. Down went the black gate deep into the marshy soil of the pheasant-drive. Tom's hands were still clasping hers with no signs of leaving go, the expression of the 'Serene Highness' seemed to change to a ghastly grin of derision, and she felt that her hour was come.

* * * * *

Sophy never knew exactly how it happened that, on the following morning, when she awoke, the great Hickathrift ring of betrothal was upon the fourth finger of her left hand. Still more bewildered and provoked did she feel, as she realised that, virtually, she had given Tom no decided answer; so that, for him, the affair was still in a state of miserable uncertainty, whilst she herself could not help being conscious that the scene she had already gone through would have to be repeated in a few days or weeks, at the utmost, probably with only the same unsatisfactory result. For she felt now that she could no longer trust herself. How could she have guessed that she would have played herself so thoroughly false, and outraged all the rules of honour and decorum which she had acted up to until this fatal moment? It is true that she had retained the mastery over her heart, but then she had completely lost her head, unexpectedly, unpardonably, idiotically!

The sight of Tom Hickathrift's honest face—pale, anxious, with tears actually starting from his faithful deep-set eyes—the presence of genuine emotion, suffering, and passion, had so affected her, that she had been no longer mistress of herself. She had begun by thinking that, when her old friend made her this formal proposal of marriage, she should probably laugh; nay, that it might require a positive effort on her part to

prevent herself from laughing too soon. But laughter, as it had turned out, was the one thing furthest removed from her imagination, and she had even ended by shedding tears !

Indeed, so sad, hopeless, and tragical, had been the whole proceeding, so pale and melancholy the faces of the two young people, that, had any of the birds'-nesting Stubberfields been so ill-advised as to play the eaves-dropper, they would certainly have concluded that something was taking place far more unpleasant than a wooing, even where the wooer was pretty certain of being refused. The day, too, had clouded over since the early morning, and an all-pervading stillness, dampness, and grayness, lent an indescribable air of melancholy to the autumnal landscape. With such mournful-looking surroundings, sanguine indeed must have been the heart capable of nursing a hope after writhing under the fatal 'No.' But the fatal 'No' had never been uttered. She had not been able to muster up the requisite courage, either, to tell Tom that she did not love him as a wife should love her husband. All this was reprehensible in the highest degree ; it was dishonourable ; it was painfully like the behaviour of a coward ; more especially did it resemble the shifting, wavering conduct to be expected of one of those inferior creatures who was 'only a woman.'

Then, again, she had actually *kissed* Tom Hickathrift ! At the time it seemed as if she could not help it, and now she could hardly believe it.

'Give me one kiss, then,' he had said, 'before we say good-bye ;' and he had looked so utterly miserable, and honest, and devoted, that she had not the heart to refuse a boon to which he appeared to attach undue importance. *To her* it seemed altogether a very trivial

and valueless concession. She required, in fact, to be told that it was wrong before she could realise that it was so, and no one happened to be there to tell her. So she got it over as soon as possible—childishly, confidently, platonically, lifting up her face to meet that of the young giant, as she used to do when she was only six years old. After this they had each wended their different ways with their handkerchiefs to their eyes.

Sophy had certainly never expected that she would have broken down in this fashion. But we none of us know of what stuff we are made till we are tried; and our bendings and breakings are apt to surprise no one so much as ourselves, since we alone know how upright was our previous intention.

The whole thing seemed now like some haunting, uncomfortable dream, leaving, after the awakening, a sense of responsibility, of obligation, of bondage, and of a conscience terribly ruffled and perturbed.

Why, oh, why had she not had the courage to exclaim boldly, 'No, no! never, never, *never!*'

These were the words which she now flattered herself she would have been able to write in a letter had Tom been generous enough to have allowed her this method of reply. For it was really ungenerous of him, she argued, to take advantage of her youth and inexperience, to lead her into a desolate autumnal wood, to bar her from all escape with a black gate, and then to make known to her, in this cowardly manner, how unhappy he was, and how madly and devotedly he loved her, until, without feeling for him anything more than the calm attachment of a friend, she had been prevented from displaying either anger, surprise, or even her customary sense of the ridiculous, and had

actually ended by seeming tender, miserable, and much too affectionate, under the circumstances! The fact was, she had never before beheld a fellow-creature giving expression to what appeared to be true masculine anguish, which she alone was called upon to curb and control. But, alas! at what price? She felt very angry with Tom now, when she thought it over: angry with herself, and angry, above all, with the great Hickathrift ring of betrothal, which had found its way to her finger, though it was so much too large for her that she had to keep it on with a little silver ring which had once belonged to her mother, and which she always wore.

Mingled with all these feelings, however (and it is sad to be obliged to acknowledge it), there lurked a germ of something very like gratified vanity. *At least*, then, she was not so far inferior to the rest of woman-kind as she had imagined when in the presence of *some people*! . . . It was evident to her now that she was no longer a mere child, and that *some one* was capable of loving her—madly, devotedly, distractedly—and of laying at her feet his heart, his name, and an ancient abbey, big enough (as Adèle had declared) to be the residence of a duke or a ‘lord mayor.’ This young man, too, whom, by reason of a personal peculiarity, she had been accustomed to speak of as the ‘Prince with the Nose,’ was in reality, if one judged by his possessions, and the quarterings upon his armorial bearings, a personage quite as important as any of the heroes created either by Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen. And the ring with which the chiefs of this ancient and illustrious family were wont to seal to themselves the ladies of their choice was now actually upon her finger!—upon *hers*!—Sophy St. Clair’s!—a

wild woman of the woods, a savage, 'an Orson in petticoats,' as she had once designated herself in a moment of deep humiliation. Might it not cause her to rise, peradventure, in the estimation of a certain *other person*—who, no doubt, looked upon her as his inferior—if he were to behold this family jewel glittering upon her finger, and hazard a guess at the reason of its being there? . . .

And at this thought a whole fabric of feminine speculation and intrigue seemed to begin weaving itself in the secret recesses of her soul.

'Take this ring, anyhow,' Sir Thomas had said to her, as he drew forth the heirloom from his waistcoat-pocket. 'I never wish to behold it again, for I fancy it seems to have brought to me ill-luck; and it can only bring it to *me*, for my mother has lived very happily with it for years. I felt so sure, somehow, that I should never be fortunate enough to see it on your hand, that I should like you to wear it for a little while, even if it's only to destroy the superstitious feeling I had about it.'

'O Tom!' she had answered him, but, being half-choked with emotion, this was all she could say.

'It's no good whatever to me, now,' continued the young man, in a broken voice. 'It's the ring with which all the ladies of our family were engaged; and if it's not fated to go upon *your* finger, I don't think I shall ever care to put it upon any one else's; and as I'm the last of us, there'll be no one to want it after me. If it's not decreed that I shall ever marry, I should like it, at least, to belong to the only woman I shall ever ask to be my wife.' And somehow he had forced it therewith upon her finger.

'O Tom!' she had exclaimed again; 'please, please

don't! What a beautiful ring! What will Lady Hickathrift say?'

'She will be wretched if I bring it back to her,' he answered. 'She'd be the first to beg you to keep it always.'

'How kind you are!' Sophy had rejoined. 'But really, really, I would rather not have it! Take it back, dear Tom!' And she returned it to him again. 'And please don't talk about not marrying. *Do marry!*—somebody much nicer, and prettier, and worthier, than I am; and give her this beautiful ring! If you don't, you'll become extinct!'

'Ah!' he had thereupon exclaimed bitterly, 'who would have thought that *you* could have been so cruel!'

'Cruel! *I* cruel?' cried the poor child, replacing the terrible ring upon her finger. 'Oh, if you only knew how hard I'm trying to be kind!'

'*Kind?*' exclaimed Tom passionately—'*kind*, to say that I shall ever fall in love with any other girl? You don't know what love is; you've never been in love yourself; you've been awfully happy all your life; and you haven't thought, and you don't know, what the feeling is, when you see a thing you've been building up for years, crumbling and falling to the ground in one moment!'

'You talk as if you were quite old!' returned Sophy, drumming upon the back of his hand consolingly. 'Cheer up, dear Tom, and don't look so miserable about a silly little thing like me!' And here she endeavoured to smile through her tears.

'Do you care about anybody else?' he had asked suddenly, looking her full in the face.

'N—no,' she answered hesitatingly, and feeling,

somehow, guilty and ashamed. 'I'm too young, as you say; I don't think I know what love is . . . I haven't thought about it . . . I don't want to let myself think of falling in love yet.'

'And you've no real dislike to me? It's not because I'm a great, big, ugly, hulking, brute, with a long nose?'

'Oh, no, no, no!' replied Sophy earnestly, as most women would have replied in her place.

'Very well, then, I shall *hope*,' rejoined Sir Thomas firmly; and probably he was hoping now.

She had fled home through the gathering twilight, oppressed with a sense of defeat and humiliation.

'I have found myself out,' she thought; 'and from this moment I give myself up! What a miserable creature I am, not daring to speak the truth!'

Later on in the evening, she could only reply to the questionings of her father:—

'I really don't know, dear. My head went; the whole thing was very dreadful. I certainly didn't say "Yes;" but I couldn't say "No." All the same, I don't mean ever to marry him!'

'Then you have come to no final decision?'

'Alas, no!' she answered dolefully; 'would that I had! But it's all in a muddle; I didn't really know that I should feel as I did. . . .'

'Perhaps, my child, you have loved poor Tom all along without being conscious of it,' said her father, feeling more and more satisfied with the manner in which affairs were apparently righting themselves; 'and when I am taken, my fair Sophia may have a home where she will be tenderly cherished.'

'Then love must be a very uncomfortable feeling,' Sophy remarked. 'But no; unfortunately, I don't

think I *love* him at all, and yet I *like* him so much. *To-day*, however, I feel angry with him, and with myself, and with everybody in the world; and *why*, seeing me so sad, should *you*, too, begin to be disagreeable, and talk about being "taken?" Oh, you mustn't be "taken" for a very, very long time; for how could I possibly live without you?" And here she found relief in a flood of tears, seeming to have been long pent up, though they had flowed so freely that very same afternoon.

The day after this first real event in Sophy's existence, was very different from the previous one. A gray pall-like mist hung over the whole landscape, obscuring all sight of the sky, whilst the chilly dampness of the atmosphere penetrated through every chink and cranny. The near woodlands looked like an indistinct mass of undulating vapour; the iron gate of the garden was hardly visible from the windows; the lawn was so clouded over with rime that the footsteps of Nelus could be seen almost as plainly as if they had been implanted upon snow; and every spider's web looked like some wonderful fabric of crystallised lace. Over everything, too, there hung a mysterious silence, broken only now and again by the stray shot of a distant sportsman, or the baying of a watch-dog in one of the neighbouring farms.

This was precisely the sort of subdued day, which (next best to one which seems all shimmer and shine) Sophy used particularly to delight in. She liked the cool damp feeling in the air, making her cheeks glow with a delicious freshness; and she would have heartily despised herself, or any one else, for remaining indoors on account of the wet.

But, somehow, this morning, she was not inclined

to go out. She decided that she would rather sit down quietly and think over the situation ; so she untied her bundle of wools, and began to work away at a knitted waistcoat : for one can knit and think at the same time, and she had always liked doing several things at once, if possible..

It is unsatisfactory, however, to knit a waistcoat when one has not the faintest idea who is eventually to wear it. What a contrast to the sweet labour which transforms every stitch into an idyl—a magic web of hopes and fears, hallowing and idealising the growing fabric which is destined one day to nestle so close to the heart of the beloved !

But Sophy's present handiwork brought with it no such honeyed mead. She had already knitted a waistcoat, not only for the man she loved, but for the man who loved her ; and she could only imagine that Nelus would be the probable recipient of the new one she was now commencing—a thought which was hardly calculated to urge the progress of her needle !

She had lately learnt a new and fashionable stitch ; and in order that she might practise it, and at the same time invest her occupation with a halo of romance, she had conceived the idea of knitting a waistcoat for Godfrey as a little cousinly present, for he had expressed a wish to possess one, and had even condescended to say of what colours it should be composed—blue, striped with black, knitted in ribs longways. She was a little bungling at first, but had improved as she went on ; and had ended by becoming so fascinated with her work that she felt impelled, after its completion, to begin at once upon another, this time with no 'prentice hand.' The colours of this one were black and lavender, exceedingly be-

coming to a fair complexion; and as all superfluous clothing would have seemed hateful to her father, there was nothing for it but to bestow it upon Tom Hickathrift. For it was part of the mysterious system of which Francis St. Clair was a follower, to dress lightly, regarding cold as a foe to be resisted with open defiance rather than to be pandered to with furs and comforters. Most of the political 'scene-shifters,' 'prompters,' and 'stage-carpenters' arrayed themselves, too, after a primitive fashion; and it was this which led Sophy, when a child, to the conclusion that to *shiver* was one of the most important tenets of the Great Cause. Of Tom's waistcoat she was particularly proud. In consequence of its subdued neutral tints he had been enabled to wear it now that he was in mourning, and, curiously enough, she had felt her eyes riveted upon the stitches even at the very moment when he was proposing to her. Godfrey's, however, was not quite so satisfactory when looked at by the light of a more perfect knowledge; and she was the more sorry for its defects, as he had lately sought out for himself new hunting-grounds, where his personal appearance would be criticised by a larger 'field.' Since the completion of the railway it took but a short time to get up to London, and thence on into 'the shires;' so that by keeping horses of his own elsewhere, or by accepting mounts from his friends, he could enjoy, from time to time, a few days' *real sport*, impossible, all true Nimrods declared, in a country so blind and wooded as the one to which he had been accustomed. One of the most annoying of the thoughts, therefore, which had crowded upon poor Sophy when her father finally abandoned his project of driving down to the seaside, originated in the knowledge that, but for the

expectation of meeting with her on that particular day, Godfrey would probably have proceeded to Melton until the end of the week.

‘Directly he has to make sacrifices for me he will probably hate me,’ thought this young lady, whose appellation signified ‘Wisdom,’ and who seemed inclined occasionally to act up to her name, as she knitted away sadly at the unpredestined waistcoat.

Hatred, perhaps, was rather too strong a term ; but was not Godfrey, at any rate, utterly indifferent ? and was not utter indifference from *him* almost as difficult to bear as hatred would have been ? She knew, at least, that he could submit to being for many days where there was no chance whatever of meeting with her, whereas Thomas Hickathrift had never been able to tear himself from her immediate vicinity : but then, as Sterne has pithily remarked, ‘It is the fate of mankind, too often, to seem insensible to what they may enjoy at the easiest rate.’

CHAPTER XI.

GODFREY ST. CLAIR, however, did not go to Melton on the day after that which he confessed had brought with it a disappointment.

He had started upon his somewhat romantic expedition in higher spirits than he was wont to indulge in ; for he had been educated to avoid all extremes, and an excessive buoyancy of mood appeared to him to be as unseemly as a morbid and unreasonable melancholy. Upon arriving at the town of Southerbourne

he had put up his horse, and loitered restlessly about the beach, throwing pebbles into the depths of the glittering waters, which, in the morning, were aglare with light. But, just as he had given up all hope of meeting with either Sophy or her father, the day clouded over, as, no doubt, it might have seemed to do even had the sun continued to shine.

This was the same gloomy change which came on at Little Stillingfleet later on in the afternoon, when the gray sea-fog floated landward, just as Sophy and Tom Hickathrift were standing hand-in-hand by the black gate in the alder-wood; and as Godfrey rode home, through the gathering mist, towards the gray home of his fathers, he found it impossible to prevent some portion of the atmospheric depression from communicating itself to his well-regulated mind.

There, straight before him, was the hoary wall of Kentish 'rag' which encircled the southern side of Dallingridge Park, revered by him in his earliest childhood, as forming then the barrier rising between the Known and the Unknown, the Seen and the Unseen, but seeming, as the years went on, to have become lower and of less account. Above it, dwarfed, by the perpetually-recurring sea-blasts, and leaning all in one direction, as though shrinking before the breath of some invisible commander, the dark crests of the Scotch firs rose sadly in the mist, forming, like the trees he had watched from the cradle of his babyhood, profile after profile, each one seeming distinct and recognisable. He asked himself almost unconsciously, as he came thus within sight of his home, what it was that this gray wall encircled which made it seem sacred to him, as though it had enclosed a treasure. He thought of the old house, his parents, the family pic-

tures; and yet, somehow, although these were within it, he missed, involuntarily, something else. At this moment—no doubt occasioned by the condition of the atmosphere—a longing possessed him for home-ties which would be warmer, closer, more indissoluble—for memories, hopes, ambitions, such as he had never yet indulged in—for an aim in his life, and a love in his heart; for it now occurred to him that he was existing without either the one or the other, and he began to wonder, incidentally, whether any one would particularly care if his horse were to throw him at that moment and break his neck.

As he entered the lodge-gate, he was within sight of that lesser gate, opposite to the woodland stile, where he had waited for Abel Reynolds's waggon in the old days; and the whole scene arose so vividly before him that, as he looked down the blank stretch of turnpike-road, he almost expected to behold the weird figure of the little girl with her bare feet and floating elf-locks, as he had beheld it at that first meeting in his departed childhood.

Such feelings as these taking possession of a young man, without, for the moment, either occupations or distractions, are not easily dispelled, and by reason of them, Godfrey St. Clair entered his ancestral halls in what was, for *him*, a somewhat emotional state of mind. If the home of his eccentric relatives at Little Stillingfleet was altogether 'scrambly' and unconventional, reeking, as it were, with an unrestrained and unrestrainable spirit of Bohemianism—a philosopher, half-clad, in the sitting-room—a neuralgic Egyptian donkey-boy in the kitchen; whilst 'brats,' cats, horses, and farm-stock, seemed to be everywhere but in their proper places,—at Dallingridge House all was order,

decorum, and punctuality. Every clock upon the high marble chimneypieces was right to a second. The breakfast, luncheon, and dressing-bells, followed regularly the example of the clocks; whilst the great booming gong, which sounded half over the park, was wont to inform the watchless wayfarer that it was half-past seven to a minute. Upon the two round tables in the large drawing-room, not a single book or casket was out of its place. No two chairs, nestling familiarly together, told of cosy or confidential converse. The blinds were all drawn up to precisely the same height on the tall windows, the footstools were never pushed away from the chairs, the sofa-cushions were unsquashed, and there were no untidy signs of feminine occupation in the form of worsted-balls or paint-boxes, as in the drawing-room at Little Stillingfleet.

Mrs. St. Clair's own private boudoir may, perhaps, have displayed occasional traces of a polite and well-regulated dilettanteism. Music-books were to be seen open before the pianoforte; some tapestry-work, half completed, stood upon a frame near the window; whilst a novel might, perhaps, be lying upon the sofa with a paper-knife protruding from its leaves. But as Godfrey rarely ventured to enter this apartment uninvited, his early impressions were chiefly derived from the appearance of the larger reception-rooms.

Upon the present occasion, after dismounting and entering the house, he crossed the entire length of the hall, meaning to go into the garden by the opposite door, when, on passing his mother's sitting-room, which lay to the left, he heard an indistinct murmur of voices, and thinking that his father had perhaps repaired thither after his drive, he concluded that he might venture in himself.

There were double doors to this apartment, and the movement of the outer one, which was ajar, was apparently unheard by the persons within; for, before making known to them his presence, Godfrey had involuntarily caught the following words, in Mrs. St. Clair's dulcet tones:—

‘*Now* do you wonder at my seeming want of affection?’

‘*I do not,*’ replied the person to whom she was appealing, in a voice which resembled the winding of a mechanical toy; and, upon entering the room, the young man was surprised to find, not his father, as he had expected, but Mr. Pettigrew. He and Mrs. St. Clair were seated rather close together over the fire, and, from the appearance of his mother's eyes, Godfrey would almost have fancied that she had been weeping, could any spell have proved potent enough to move a woman seemingly so unemotional. Pettigrew, too, looked paler than usual, and, without taking any notice of the intruder, he made a dash at his hat. The Low-Church clergy had not taken as yet to their flabby ‘wide-awakes’ and unkempt beards, nor the more Ritualistic to shaven cheeks and the hideous inverted soup-plate with tassels (forerunner, peradventure, of the Continental shovel-hat, which is really picturesque); so that the curate walked away in all the glories of ‘chimney-pot’ and mutton-chop whiskers, since it was under this dispensation that he lived.

At first Godfrey could not help feeling indignant that Pettigrew, for whom his affection had not increased since his boyhood, should be permitted to ensconce himself thus confidentially in the cushioned chairs of this sacred chamber, which he (Godfrey) was so seldom privileged to enter, and perhaps something

of this betrayed itself upon his countenance. But he had formed the habit of checking at once any thought which imputed the slightest shadow of blame to either of his parents, and he set about explaining, therefore, this mysterious interview to his mother's advantage. He remembered to have heard that women—irreproachable wives and mothers—occasionally possessed hidden sorrows, which they would confide to none but God and their priest; and he recalled to mind historical instances wherein ladies who, with their husbands and sons, were described as distant and reserved, had yet been completely under the domination of the Church. Another example was no doubt confronting him on the present occasion. Wonder of wonders! his mother tearful and embarrassed! Pettigrew, too, apparently deeply affected! Doubtless she had just been confiding to her spiritual adviser some secret sorrow which oppressed her maternal heart.

In consequence of the somewhat melting mood in which the young heir of Dallingridge found himself just then, a sudden tenderness overflowed his whole being at the idea that perhaps his mother was secretly suffering. This apparent coldness, this seeming reserve, might be in reality nothing more than the studied reticence of a proud spirit unwilling to display its bleeding wounds to the multitude.

'What is it, mother?' any other son would probably have inquired, and he might even have clasped in his filial arms the sorrowing and beautiful woman before him. But Godfrey had been trained up in other ways, and had the impulse seized him, he would probably have felt bound to dismiss it.

As they were standing thus, both of them apparently

experiencing a certain sense of embarrassment, a new emotion suddenly came to their relief. One of Mrs. St. Clair's love-birds, which was allowed to fly about the room at will, as though for the express purpose of creating a diversion, even at the risk of its own life, walked cautiously out of its cage, looking as wise the while as Minerva's owl, and flew deliberately into the fireplace, where it perched coquettishly upon one of the smouldering logs.

'Oh, look at "Lou-lou!"' exclaimed Mrs. St. Clair anxiously. 'If she is burnt, "Picot" will be sure to die.'

Godfrey immediately went to the open cage, and took from it some grains of hemp-seed, and after closing the door to prevent further catastrophes, he endeavoured, by holding them towards 'Lou-lou,' to attract her from her perilous position. Eve-like, she soon responded to the temptation, but in crossing a fiery ravine, between two pieces of wood, one of her wings was severely burnt.

'Poor little thing!' cried Mrs. St. Clair, holding her favourite to her bosom, and caressing its bright-green plumage.

Godfrey, too, began stroking the bird, and in so doing, he came in contact with the soft white hand of his mother.

The wife of Erskine St. Clair could not now have been less than forty, but she was still so beautiful a woman as to suggest the notion that she had discovered the elixir of perpetual youth, and Godfrey, as he stood leaning over her, looking more at her than at the wounded love-bird, could not help thinking this. As he examined it closely, he perceived that not a single silver thread streaked the sleek masses of dark hair,

which were coiled tightly round her neatly-shaped head, her complexion was as blooming as that of a girl of eighteen, her long blue eyes were as bright as they had ever been, and, except that her face wore a harder and more set expression, she was but little changed since the days of her first youth.

‘Poor little thing!’ Godfrey repeated, still smoothing the bright-green feathers. ‘And poor, dear mother!’ he added, urged by he knew not what sudden movement of tenderness, as he retained the slender hand in his own; ‘for I see that you are unhappy.’ And bowing his head, he pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

Now certainly it was not the first time that he had done this since the old days when she used to permit him to embrace her somewhere near the little shell-like ear, which was all she had ever presented to his boyish lips; but it was, perhaps the first occasion upon which he had, as it were, unexpectedly and spontaneously, at no given or fixed period of departure or home-coming—without excuse of birthday or sacred festival—imprinted, thus suddenly and impulsively, a kiss upon his mother’s brow.

Also he was both wounded and astonished at the effect produced upon her by his undue familiarity, although he was aware that the usually-existing maternal element had been left out of her composition. But it seemed to him now that this omission went even further than he had supposed; for she drew herself away from him suddenly, almost as though she had been stung by a serpent, whilst a strange expression came for a moment into her long blue eyes, not unlike that which passes through those of some feline creature when it is about to spring.

‘Pray don’t go through the form of kissing me!’

she remarked, in a tone of concentrated bitterness; 'kissing is nearly always such a ridiculous farce!'

Stung and shocked in his keenest sensibilities, the young man, too, hastily recoiled from such uncongenial contact, and passed out of the room into the garden. There, a sense of desolation, strangely at variance with his usual complacent mood, swept over his spirit, and for a while he did not himself know what peculiar form his fit of depression might take. Later on, an uncontrollable longing after sympathy and affection gained possession of him; and, betaking himself to the deserted library, he felt impelled, by a force too strong to be resisted, to sit down to the writing-table, where he wrote the following lines with one of the new quill-pens he found there:—

'You were not at Southerbourne to-day, though I waited there until four o'clock. For God's sake, let me see you to-morrow! I will wait in the hazel-copse, near to the oak-tree bench, between three and four.'

After pressing this brief note upon a sheet of virgin blotting-paper, he directed it to Sophy, and felt happier for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XII.

EARLY the next morning Godfrey received Sophy's letter. It told him that he had been in her mind at any rate during the short time she was inditing it, though of course this thought might suggest itself at sight of the handwriting of the most indifferent of correspondents. But to Sophy, Godfrey's few hurried

lines came like the blessed dew from heaven upon a flower that has been parched in the wilderness. It was brought to her as she was engaged with her prosaic knitting; and the warm blood rushed tumultuously to her cheeks as she eagerly devoured his words.

Sophy was pre-eminently sympathetic and appreciative of the feelings of others, and to her keen perception Godfrey's letter appeared to be, what in reality it was, the involuntary cry of a wounded spirit. The tears came blindingly into her large eyes as she thought that he was unhappy; that he, unemotional, unsympathetic even, as he had sometimes seemed, had actually need of her; and with this an intense feeling of gratitude passed over her spirit towards the Great Creator of all things, whom she had never been taught to individualise, or to call by His name 'JAH;' so that, looking towards the shrouded face of external nature, she could only murmur in her heart, pantheistically,—

'I thank you and bless you, woods and fields and floating autumn clouds! He is in want of me! I may comfort him, and I am happy!'

But Godfrey, having, as the saying goes, 'slept' upon his melting mood, arrived at the trysting-place thoroughly steeled against his own emotions. The influence of early training is proverbially lasting. He had hitherto been accustomed to measure the force he should employ to defend, by the strength of that which he conceived would be likely to attack; and in this way he had succeeded in preserving a very creditable balance of moral power. Upon the present occasion he saw no reason why he should relinquish his system.

All Sophy's warm sympathy, therefore, her gratitude

to Heaven, and the superabundant vitality which she had brought with her to the tryst, seemed suddenly to receive a check when she encountered that 'repose of Vere de Vere' in which her cousin appeared to be shrouded; and her enthusiasm experiencing what she felt to be an undeserved and unexpected affront, she took refuge, as she generally did, in a kind of nervous and excitable prattle, to fill up the silences which were so long and formidable when Godfrey was fixing her with his earnest dark eyes, and yet not adventuring a syllable.

The Great Prophet had been staying with them again, she said, and she described the original dinner-party which had been given in his honour: the cooking of the *kebobs*; the amicable meeting of the two hostile guests; the dispute between the hitherto 'friendly disciples about the composition of the *pillauf*'; and, finally, the departure of the seer.

'And I don't suppose you would have known,' she added, 'if you had met him upon his journey, that he was such a very remarkable man, and quite different from anybody else.'

'And yet he evidently is,' rejoined Godfrey, 'or *you think so*, which comes to the same thing. Were they all Orientals at your dinner?'

'Not all of them. There were persons of several nations: an Irishman, a Dane, and an Italian Prince, who is an *attaché*. They were all very much interested in the Great Cause except the Prince, who seemed more inclined to laugh with me at the others.'

'Really?' remarked Godfrey, somewhat sarcastically. 'To laugh *with* you!'

'Yes; and he was really amusing, for he talked of other things besides politics. One of his stories was rather funny.'

‘What was it about?’ inquired the young man, rather contemptuously.

Evidently he felt no love for this Italian Prince! Sophy was glad of this, for some inexplicable reason, and she continued, speaking very fast, as though in order to keep up her own courage,—

‘Well, it was the story of an adventure of his own—for some people *have adventures*, you know—some romantic people *like them*, and are *on the look-out for them*,’ she added, in a marked tone.

‘I suppose you mean that I am neither romantic nor adventurous: however, go on.’

‘Well, then,’ continued Sophy, smarting a little under this command to proceed, ‘after dinner my father made some allusion to Scotland, having, like *your* father, Scotch blood, and being very proud of it; and it so happened that, just at that moment, Janus, our maid, brought round a salad, in which there were some hard-boiled eggs, and the Prince said that this reminded him of an adventure which once happened to him. Father never drinks anything except water, but I noticed that the Prince filled up his glass very often with wine’

‘And this anecdote, I suppose, was the result. Well?’

‘He then told us,’ continued Sophy, pleased to have pitched upon a subject which was thoroughly impersonal, ‘that once, when he was travelling in Scotland, a lady, who lived in an enormous castle, fell desperately in love with him.’

‘How like a foreigner, to boast about women!’ exclaimed Godfrey indignantly. ‘I dare say *he* fell in love with *her*!’

‘No, that was the worst of it: he didn’t care nearly so much.’

'Ugh!' muttered the young man, with an expression of disgust.

'But unfortunately,' Sophy went on, 'this lady was married to some one else; a very disagreeable, jealous, ugly kind of person, and quite old: but she managed to smuggle the Prince into the castle somehow without his knowing it, where she hid him away in a lumber-room in a distant turret for a fortnight, and fed him every evening with hard-boiled eggs.'

'And you actually believed him?' inquired Godfrey, espousing the cause of the Scotch *châteline* with apparent warmth.

'I believed him,' answered Sophy, 'because he told us it was perfectly true. She used to come and see him every evening, after dark, bringing him the eggs in her pocket. The first day he was so dreadfully hungry that he ate them all; on the next, he didn't like them so much; on the third day he wasn't at all inclined for them; and, at last, he took such a disgust to them, and to the poor lady, that he said he had never since been able to think without horror of either Scotland, Scotch ladies, or hard-boiled eggs!'

'The whole story was probably a lie,' said Godfrey. 'A beastly foreigner will say anything.'

'It's very narrow-minded,' she replied, glad, at any rate, to see her imperturbable kinsman in some way moved, 'to speak of all foreigners as "beastly." It's the regular "roast-beef-of-old England" cant and clap-trap; it means nothing, except that the person who says it is ignorant and doesn't know foreigners a bit!'

'I wish *you* didn't know quite so much of them, with all my heart,' rejoined the young man, with a sigh, which was more angry than sad. 'And I wish your father wouldn't let you listen to their boasting,

lying, blackguardly, after-dinner stories: they're not fit for you to hear.'

'Knowledge is power,' answered Sophy, with a wave of the hand. 'The more one knows, the better one can distinguish between good and evil. It's the people who know little who always fly out against what seems to them to be wrong; and they do this because they don't know the difference between wickedness and folly, being too stupid!'

'Thank you,' said Godfrey, smiling at her warmth.

She had hoped, at least, that he would have been angry.

'I dare say the story mayn't have been true,' she continued, with renewed courage; 'but, at any rate, it was *amusing*. It made one feel, too, that there *are* people in the world who let themselves go and say too much, as well as people who seem to count ten before every sentence, and weigh every word.'

'I wish, Sophy,' remarked Godfrey gravely, 'that you could like things and people more because they were great and good and true than because they were amusing and out of the common. At first sight your originality is a great charm, I admit; but, somehow, after knowing you well, one feels that it's rather a blemish. There are times when one almost wishes you were more like other people.'

'And I should like you a great deal better, too, if you weren't so dreadfully "cut-and-dried,"' she answered, with sudden recklessness, feeling that to quarrel, even, would be better than to go on for ever without moving either backwards or forwards. I wish you'd sometimes speak out and let me know what you are, for now I really don't in the least know; you seem to be a follower of that man who said that speech was

given us to conceal our thoughts, or like a person perpetually dancing a Court minuet in the reign of Louis Quatorze.'

'And what would you have me dance?' he demanded, smiling. 'An Irish jig?'

'Yes; if it was an honest, merry kind of jig,' she replied, seeming to become inspired with sudden energy. 'But a premeditated, sarcastic kind of jig, is quite as wearisome as any other stilted and affected sort of dance. Be *yourself*, and let me see what you are made of. *Take off your mask!*'

As she uttered these words she looked her companion straight in the face, and she fancied that he quailed beneath her glance. She was playing a desperate game, and she knew it. For the first time she was addressing one to whom she had unconsciously looked up as a god, as if he had been an ordinary mortal; and though she was shocked herself at her own temerity, some malicious demon seemed to be pushing her on to the last extremity of impertinence.

'You are very severe upon me,' returned Godfrey, without raising his eyes; 'and yet I don't know what I can have done to make you so angry.'

'Nor do I,' she went on, unreasonably. 'I can't explain exactly why I am angry with you, but the fact that I feel so, shows me that you are somehow in the wrong; and to-day I am brave, and can tell you so. Generally, I am so afraid of you that I daren't speak openly to you, as I do to others.'

'What is my offence?' demanded Godfrey sadly. He had, at any rate, taken her words seriously.

'Your offence is, that your reserve wounds me,' answered Sophy desperately. 'It's like a reproach to me for my impulsiveness. I feel hoidenish and gushing, always, when I'm with you; and you seem to try

to make me feel more so. Besides, I want to *know you* . . . Father says, if one scratches a Russian one finds the Tartar; and he says he likes what's underneath better than what's at the top, and perhaps it might be the same with you: so do let me know what you really are—don't seem always like the man with the iron mask!

'Perhaps I should be worse than you think,' he answered. 'Surely self-control can never be unwise?'

'I hope, indeed, that you *are* worse!' she exclaimed, the tears coming into her eyes: 'for then you would seem more like an equal.'

'Dear Sophy,' said he, coming nearer to her, and looking at her earnestly and reproachfully, 'what can you possibly mean?'

Sophy never afterwards knew what it was which induced her at this moment to think of the great Hickathrift ring of betrothal, as of a talisman which might invest its wearer with dignity and honour. Perhaps she was urged on by the same persistent demon who had already tempted her to reproach, without reason, the being she loved most in the world. Be this how it may, she drew off her glove and passed her hand carelessly through her hair, holding it in such a position as to display the hereditary jewel to her young kinsman.

'What a quaint old ring!' he exclaimed, suddenly gaining possession of her ungloved hand. 'Is it Oriental?'

'No; but that's just what I thought it was at first. Isn't it like the window of a little mosque?'

'I never saw a mosque,' replied her cousin. 'Was it given you by the Great Prophet?'

'No; it was given me by Tom Hickathrift. It's the ring with which all the ladies of his family have been engaged.'

She had played her trump-card recklessly and des-

perately ; and she now waited, breathless and empty-handed, for the result. This was even more remarkable than she had dared to anticipate. Her cousin's face became suddenly overspread with an ashen pallor, as he exclaimed bitterly,—

‘So you *are* engaged to be married to Hickathrift? I thought so!’ And from his countenance it seemed as though it would have relieved him to have made use of some forcible expression, as what Sophy was wont to call ‘a reining-in look’ was strongly marked upon it.

‘No, I’m not,’ she faltered, flattered and yet frightened at seeing him so moved.

‘But he has proposed to you? He has asked you to be his wife ; and you have allowed him to put this hideous thing upon your finger?’

‘Yes,’ replied Sophy, in a trembling voice. ‘Just now you said it was a quaint old ring.’

‘That was before I knew. And what did you say when he proposed to you? “Yes,” of course!’

‘I neither said “Yes” nor “No,”’ answered Sophy, looking down at the ring. And, indeed, this came very near to the truth.

‘And what made you do that?’ asked Godfrey ; ‘*you*, who pride yourself upon being open and natural and aboveboard—you, who taunt me because I don’t wear my heart upon my sleeve?’

‘I—I—shall never marry him,’ said Sophy, trembling all over, and fairly alarmed now at the result of her indiscretion.

‘Then why not tell him so? But no—you are playing with him instead, in order to lead him on, and make him all the more eager to marry you—that is very like a woman, but not a woman such as I had hoped that you were. Well, at any rate, we shall be

neighbours!’ And turning aside, he began to vent his irritation upon an inoffensive bramble-bush, flicking its red leaves into ribbons with his stick.

‘I meant nothing. I feel for him as if he was my brother. I don’t love him enough to marry him!’

‘Then why make him think that you do?’ asked Godfrey, with warmth. ‘Why try to make *me* think so? and why offend my eyes by wearing this hideous thing? Take it off!’ Yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, he seized her hand before she had time to resist him, and drawing off the great Hickathrift ring, which was so loose that the difficulty from the first had been how to keep it on, he flung it with all his might into the midst of the adjoining hazel-copse. Sophy heard a ‘click,’ as though it had struck against the circular bench which surrounded the trunk of the gnarled oak-tree; but, even with this clue to its whereabouts, she felt there was no certainty that she should ever recover it.

‘O Godfrey!’ she exclaimed, terrified at such unexpected violence. ‘Please, please don’t! It’s their family ring of betrothal—it really is! What shall I do? Whatever can I say to Tom?’

‘You can say this to him,—that *I*, your kinsman, bearing your name, and feeling in some measure responsible for your actions, flung away in a moment of anger and disappointment what seemed to me a sham—a hideous gewgaw set upon your finger to deceive two people, who, being both of them honest men, deserve fair play!’

Sophy was now pale, terrified, and repentant; but Godfrey continued mercilessly, still speaking as though from a pinnacle,—

‘If I have for once given way to violence in your

presence, forgive me, and remember that you had begun by taunting me with my reserve, which to you seemed to imply a want of candour. Who knows, however, if after all, I may not be the more candid of us two?—the more easily deceived, perhaps? Thank God if I am not, for I would rather be offended with my own shortcomings than with yours!’

‘I know I have heaps of defects,’ faltered poor Sophy. ‘When did I ever pretend to be perfect?’

‘There are many defects which have in them nothing to offend, the result of youth and inexperience alone: with these no one could justly reproach you. But try, dear Sophy, never to stoop to arts at which you may one day blush. I ask you this before I leave you—for some time, perhaps. Above all, if you desire to gain the love of others and to retain your own self-respect, *you*, who are so beautiful, and who possess so much to make you lovable, do not condescend to set off one man against another—*l’un pour entraîner l’autre*, as some of your foreign friends might express it. Leave that to women who can please in no other way. Good-bye.’

He held out his hand, as it seemed to her, almost parentally, vaulted over the low wooden fence, and was gone.

Sophy remained, stupefied and bewildered, watching him until he was out of sight, but he strode on without once looking back, flicking at everything that came in his way with his cane. He thought it strange afterwards that, feeling as he did, he should have whistled on his way home; but there is a kind of whistling which proceeds more from a perturbed spirit than from lightness of heart, so that this need not be taken as a sign that he was altogether unmoved: for if his own words had left his young cousin in a state of blank

despair and consternation, her imperative and unexpected 'Take off your mask!' had also affected him considerably, and led him to encourage rather than subdue the unusual fit of recklessness which he felt was upon him.

Whistling still, he entered the house, and hearing sounds of music proceeding from his mother's boudoir, he walked boldly in, never pausing this time to 'wipe his boots,' either in spirit or in deed. He was desirous of making a communication to his father, but he found he was not there. His mother and Mr. Pettigrew were seated near to the pianoforte, with an open music-book in front of them. Mr. St. Clair, he was informed, had just gone into his study to rest before dinner, and had desired that he should not be disturbed.

'Mr. Pettigrew and I were just trying over that anthem in C,' explained Mrs. St. Clair, in accents more conciliatory than she was wont to address to her son.

'Oh, were you?' he answered, with a manner which caused her to look up suddenly, slightly elevating her regular eyebrows; and passing out of the room without another word, he strode up to his bedchamber, banging the door after him as he entered it, so that it re-echoed through the length and breadth of the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER Godfrey had departed, Sophy remained for some time in a state of helpless despondency. Her heart seemed to be beating very loudly, and she was trying hard to feel angry and aggrieved, to imagine that her cousin had endeavoured to dictate to her—to master her without due reason or excuse. With this, however,

she experienced, somehow, a desire, a longing, to be dictated to and mastered by him, by this strong, earnest nature, which seemed to stand revealed to her for the first time. So free was he (she said to herself) from all guile and disloyalty, that, at the risk of offending her even, he could tell her, as now, of her numerous shortcomings. He had worn, too, whilst lecturing her, a look of disappointment, (this was the hardest of all to bear!), a look as though he had expected better things of her—of *her*, a savage, a heathen, a wild woman of the woods! And yet, was it not for his sake alone that she had endeavoured to control her Bohemian nature, and striven to think and talk like other people—to wear gloves, and to resist the temptation of shocking her neighbours in a thousand different ways? . . . But he had never known it; it had all been thrown away upon him! . . .

She knew now that he had been her ideal, her one dream, this beautiful boy, who had seemed to her, even in their childish days, to be above her in everything; to step down, not merely from the higher ground of Great Stillingfleet—the which, with its surrounding broad acres, he would one day inherit—but to descend like some bright young god of antiquity from a rosy cloud, lowering himself by holding converse with her in her rags of mortality; nay, even trying to improve and elevate her unregenerate nature. With all the strength of her warm, impulsive heart, she had adored this condescending young god, but now he had mounted into his chariot again, and floated away upon his cloud. As for poor Tom Hickathrift, she thought, what was *he* in comparison? A kind, good-hearted creature enough, but moulded from Nature's most ordinary clay. That he was brave, and generous, and fond of

her, she knew perfectly well. Two of these things had made her respect him, and the last, perhaps, had flattered her a little, and even pleased her. And why? Alas! (for here she was constrained against her will to unearth a sorry truth!) upon poor Tom she had practised, woman-like, as musicians have been known to practise upon a dumb pianoforte, whereon no discord can offend, 'just to keep their hands in,' as the saying goes. So had Tom Hickathrift been used, and now he had fulfilled his thankless mission and was done with. But for whom was reserved the finished tune, the perfect melody? . . .

The thought of Tom reminded her of the Great Hickathrift ring, and, going sadly to the place where she fancied it had fallen, she began to search high and low for the accursed thing, which had proved (as it had turned out) the cause of her present sorrow. But it was nowhere to be found. Vainly did she look for it under the damp, decaying leaves, between the planks of the bench, and even amongst the twisted branches of the oak-tree. She felt annoyed that it should have been lost; but this annoyance seemed to be of little account compared to the fact that she had quarrelled with Godfrey, that he had left her in anger, and, worse than all, that she now knew for certain how dear he had always been to her. A thousand tender memories rose up to convince her of this, and, sinking down upon the gray lichen-stained bench, she covered her face with her hands and burst into a flood of tears.

Her actual paroxysm of grief did not last long: those few tears were a relief; but when they left her eyes dry again she seemed to look out upon a different world. She had quarrelled with Godfrey, she had taunted and reproached him in many bitter ways. She

had done so before, in a lesser degree, and he had borne it because he was noble, and chivalrous, and generous, and because she was 'only a woman.' She found no name now too hard to apply to herself; she had even enough of the savage still in her composition to feel a desire to cut and lacerate herself as a punishment: but, alas, this would do no good! Besides which, was she not punished enough already? for was he not gone from her, and did she not love him?

'Oh my dear, dear love!' she exclaimed pitifully in the silent watches of the night, when she, and she only, lay awake in that sleepy little house, 'you were with me once, and we were so happy; but now I have made you angry, and driven you away, and you will never, never know what I feel about it!' And here she began sobbing again, until the pillow was quite wet with her tears.

When Jane came in, in the morning, to call her, she was astonished at her disconsolate appearance. Just as the wintry sun shed a pale light through the unshuttered panes of the window she had fallen into a deep slumber.

'Why, missy, you be asleep, surely!' exclaimed the honest serving-woman, as she gazed at the prostrate form of her young mistress.

Sophy's bed was, indeed, in strange disorder, and her face bore unmistakable traces of her first real heart-ache. Her knees were disposed in the form of an Alpine peak beneath the white coverlid; one despairing arm hung listlessly at her side; her dark hair, which had become untied during those hours of self-humiliation, strayed over her pillow in long dishevelled coils; and her side-face, with its closed eyelids and fringed lashes, looked sharp, and pinched, and unaccountably sad.

Poor Jane was quite alarmed.

'Get up, missy!' she cried anxiously, as she stepped forward and shook her by the round, white, hanging arm. 'Get up, now, for the Lord's sake! You look as if you were dead!'

Thus aroused, Sophy slowly opened her large eyes, collected her ideas, remembered (as, somehow, if one has a sorrow, one always *does* remember at waking) what the soreness meant which was gnawing at her heart, and sinking back again upon her pillow, as though utterly exhausted, said gloomily,—

'No, I don't see the use of getting up. I shall stay in bed. There can't be any good thing in to-day!' And here she began sobbing and sighing anew.

'Lord a' mussy, missy! what's the matter?' asked Jane, sitting down upon the bed and taking her hand. 'Maybe you've gone and got your feet wet, and caught a chill-like. You beän't agooin' fur to take on so, be sure now?'

'O Janus, don't, please, say silly things about taking chills, as if that could possibly make me cry! I wish, indeed, I could confide to you everything I feel, and all that has happened to me. But you wouldn't understand it. You've never known what it is to be unhappy. Nelus has always behaved well to you,' she added suddenly. This was intended as a 'feeler,' to ascertain if Jane Ford could sympathise with sorrows of the heart.

'Oh, Miss Sophy, doän't you goo fur to take on so!' repeated Jane reproachfully. 'And as to dat 'ere Nelus, afor I gone to church along on him, Nelus he wur a terrible young Turk!'

'You needn't take any trouble about my hair,' Sophy remarked tearfully, when, half an hour later, Jane, who

was treating her like a baby under her affliction, had finished brushing her luxuriant tresses. 'I don't think I could bear the weight of it round my head. You can plait it, and let it hang down; and give me my very ugliest dress,' she added, forgetting that she possessed only two available winter gowns.

'Why, surely, missy,' cried Jane, regarding her in wonderment, 'you'll look for all the world like the maiden "all forlorn"!''

'So I am "all forlorn." Go away now, and don't ask me any more questions; and if my father says anything about my being so late, be sure and tell him that I've only got a headache.'

Jane Ford did as she was bidden, muttering to herself that her young mistress was just like all the other persons of her acquaintance, who had been either 'moonstruck' or 'bewitched;' and Sophy was left once more to her melancholy reflections.

She dressed herself languidly and without enthusiasm. Her selected gown looked creased and tumbled. Jane had asked her if she should not 'iron it out,' but she had answered that she preferred it as it was; and so she did. The knowledge that no one will look upon her with a loving or admiring eye has turned many a woman into a sloven; but Sophy's present carelessness was rather the protest of a mournful dependency, the sackcloth and ashes of a loving and repentant spirit, which took the form of hanging tresses and unironed garments. Her aspect was truly pitiable; and as she contemplated herself in the looking-glass she could not help remarking it.

'At any rate, I *look* unhappy,' she thought. 'What a difference it makes in one's face! But I don't care in the least how I look *now*!'

At this moment Jane, with a beaming countenance, re-entered the apartment.

'I've good news for you, missy,' she said cheerfully; 'and you'll have time fur to let me iron out your frock, fur I sez as how you'd overslep' yourself; and he'll wait.'

"Overslept myself; and he'll wait"?' repeated Sophy, bewildered. 'Who'll wait? Please, please tell me at once, or you'll drive me out of my mind!'

'It's the young Sir Tummus as is below, missy,' explained the serving-woman. 'He wur just stept out by chance-like, afoor his breakfastes, when dat 'ere black dawg o' his tears off after some'ut, and no whistlin' would do fur un, so he thought p'raps he was a-got to terrifyin' of your cats.'

'Oh, it's always my cats!' cried Sophy, in a tone of irritation; for never in her life had she felt less disposed for an interview with the man whom she regarded, unjustly, as the cause of her present unhappiness. 'Give my compliments to him, and say that his dog isn't worrying my cats that I know of; and if it *was*, I shouldn't very much care, for I don't seem to care to-day for anything in the world!'

'The breakfastes be all ready,' hazarded Jane Ford, with an imploring look; for the 'young Sir Tummus' was extremely popular with both great and small. 'There be a couple of poached eggs and a dish of bacon, and there's sausingers in the kitchen, wot What-you-call-um's been a havin' on.'

'I forbid you to ask him to breakfast!' exclaimed Sophy, with determination. 'Tell him I'm ill; tell him anything, only send him away! And how often have I told you not to give pork to Abdallah? It's against his religion.'

'You do look so beautiful, miss!' persisted Jane, still anxious that she should relent. 'And if I say you're ill, we shall have him and the whole family a-coming to inquire, and them 'ere new loose covers not done yet fur the drawing-room cheers!'

'That's true, Janus; you're a sensible creature. Say, then, that I'm not very well, but that I'm not ill. Invent some sort of complaint that isn't serious, and that you'd think nothing of yourself, only be sure and say that I can't see him.'

A few moments later she peeped out of the window, hearing Tom's departing footsteps upon the gravel-walk, only she took care that he should not see her. In her heart she could not help feeling some compunction, so slowly and unwillingly did he seem to go from her; and she could sympathise now with all those who really loved. But it was with a sense of relief that she knew he was gone; and Jane came presently to assure her of the fact.

'And you said that I was not very well, but that I had nothing serious the matter?'

'I said,' replied the waiting-woman, 'that you was took poorly with the sick headache, and looked all nohow; and he said as 'twas his belief as how the sick headache was a-gooing about.'

Sophy, however, felt particularly annoyed at being supposed to suffer from an ailment which she regarded as pre-eminently unromantic.

'I am sorry, Janus,' she remarked, 'that you should have thought fit to say anything so *disgusting* and so *untrue*. However, what *does* it signify? So long as it keeps tiresome people away, you may say I have the smallpox if you like! Still, you *know* that I have never once been ill in the horrid way you said. What will they think of me at the Abbey?'

Poor Jane was sorry to have annoyed her young mistress, although, being a person without refinement, she failed to perceive in what manner she had offended. As Sophy was, however, extremely anxious to do away with an erroneous impression, she sat down at once and wrote the following note, which it was intended that Nelus should convey to Poynings Abbey as soon as he had finished his dinner :—

‘ MY DEAR TOM,—I have undergone a great deal of mental worry lately, and am, consequently, not quite in my *usual spirits*. This made me late this morning ; and I asked Jane to explain to you that I was not able to see you when you so kindly called. She gave you, however, quite a wrong account of my illness. My headache was merely what is called “*nervous*,” for I am really quite well, only a *little sad*. I also think that it is right to tell you that *it can never be* (what we spoke about in the wood, by the black gate). It is more honest and fair to tell you this than to keep you any longer in suspense ; and I would send you back, with this letter, the beautiful ring you so kindly *would give me*, only, unfortunately, it has *been mislaid*, and I cannot find it at present.’

But before Nelus had had time to start off with this note, an opportunity occurred of sending it by a fleeter messenger ; for a groom in the Hickathrift sables spurred hurriedly up to the door, armed with a large package tied round with pink ribbon. This contained two bottles of medicine, which kind Lady Hickathrift (as she explained in a note) had at once despatched upon hearing of Sophy’s indisposition, having prepared the decoctions ‘with her own hands’ from a family recipe. Hereupon Sophy felt compelled to write another letter, which was sent off by the groom with that which was intended for Tom. It ran as follows :

‘MY DEAR LADY HICKATHRIFT,—I was extremely sorry that when Sir Thomas called this morning I was not well enough to see him; and I am very much obliged to you for your kind thought of me in sending me so much medicine. I do not think, however, that it will benefit me to partake of it, as my headache arose merely from nervousness and from a sleepless night, and was not of the kind which our servant stupidly described to Sir Thomas.—With my father’s kindest regards, believe me to be your very affectionate,

SOPHY ST. CLAIR.’

HAVING fired off these two epistles, she felt somewhat pacified. She had eased her conscience, too, by nipping, as she conceived, in the very bud, any aspirations which poor Tom might be nursing, by the chilling and withering sentence, ‘*It can never be.*’

‘And you can throw all that horrible stuff out of the window,’ she said, turning to Jane, and indicating the decoctions with an expression of disgust.

‘Yes, sure/y, missy,’ Jane had made answer, with the manner of a ‘kicked dog;’ but Sophy afterwards learnt that, thinking it ‘a sin to waste good medicine,’ she had administered it to ‘What-you-call-um’ (by which name it was her habit to designate the Egyptian), and that, in consequence, ‘What-you-call-um’ (to make use of Nelus’s forcible expression) was a ‘daanged sight better.’

CHAPTER XIV.

ALTHOUGH Godfrey St. Clair, after his short interview with his mother, had closed the door of his room upon the outer world, he could not exclude the conflicting emotions which crowded in upon him uninvited, reducing his mind to a state of confusion to which it

had been hitherto unaccustomed. He endeavoured to analyse and classify his sensations; but his brain seemed to have lost for the moment its former powers of just criticism, and he could only recognise in the abstract an all-pervading sense of *désillusionnement* and soreness of heart.

Like Sophy, he had never paused to ask himself what was his ultimate intention. He had been content to drift, straw-like, upon the stream of destiny; for, to a man, marriage is not the storm-proof goal, or haven, which it often seems to be to a woman, and it seldom presents itself to his imagination save as a dim and shadowy possibility. The pleasure, therefore, which he had experienced in Sophy's society had never warned him to expect any change in his own feelings; and the thought of this delightful period of unquestioning contentment, came back to him now hallowed by all the tenderness of regret, which must ever accompany the memory of 'a day that is dead,' when that day has held what no other seems likely to hold in the future. For, at the end of his reasoning, he had come to the conclusion that he must give up seeing his cousin, at any rate for some time, if he desired to secure peace either for her or for himself. He strove hard to look at the situation dispassionately, and, setting aside all selfish considerations, he felt, as her kinsman and best friend, how highly advantageous to her would be her union with Sir Thomas Hickathrift of Poynings Abbey. Had she been his sister, or any ordinary girl-cousin, this would have been, indeed, a 'consummation devoutly to be wished.' Tom Hickathrift, his old Eton friend, his near neighbour, and one of the county magnates—could anything possibly be more satisfactory? But *now*— And here again he felt an inexplic-

able soreness of heart, mingled with a longing for action, excitement, and change of scene, which might bring with it, likewise, a change of ideas.

Yes, he would leave England for a while—he would travel in distant lands, and endeavour to comprehend and sympathise more with the customs and peculiarities of their varied inhabitants; for he had felt Sophy's taunt about his ignorance of foreign people and habits, and he began to wonder whether there was not some truth in her remark about the 'roast-beef-of-old-England cant and clap-trap.' At any rate, there were many things to be seen in the world besides those which lay in his immediate path. Why should he not see them, and gain wisdom and experience in the seeing?

The idea that this would entail giving up Sophy's society, at least for some time, did, indeed, send a painful thrill through his whole being; but he had been accustomed to look upon life as a state of probation, of dissatisfaction, of struggle, and to regard with a certain sad self-complacency any act partaking of the nature of a sacrifice or penance.

'I could not love thee, dear, so well,
Loved I not honour more,'

and 'honour' seemed now to demand of him that he should give up for the time being the pleasure of his cousin's society, leaving her to his friend and neighbour to win and to woo for his own, without let or hindrance. To say that he felt like the king in the fairy tale, who has sworn to sacrifice to an implacable genius, or wizard, the first object he encountered, after that object had turned out to be his soul's beloved, will give some notion of his sensations. Indeed, honour had lately

seemed to him, upon several occasions, to have become a veritable bugbear—a voracious Cerberus, into whose many mouths he appeared to be perpetually flinging buns; and he could not help trembling at the possible reaction which might one day ensue upon so disagreeable and monotonous an occupation.

This day had not yet arrived, however, and whilst he had the strength he would strive. Hence, after a very minute self-examination, he came to the conclusion that the wisest and most honourable course for him to pursue would be to leave Dallingridge almost immediately, in order that he might make what used formerly to be called the *grand tour*, without which the education of no young gentleman was thought complete.

Your doctor of the soul is strangely at variance with your doctor of the body upon the subject of self-examination—the one telling us to search, probe, and keep a continual watch over our emotions; whilst the other admits that, after certain broad hygienic rules have been laid down and acted upon, too minute a scrutiny of either our physical or mental condition is apt to generate a species of neurosis, which may take the form, in time, of chronic hypochondria, and encourage the growth of those very evils which it is our interest to prevent. Certain it was that the constant inward-gazing of Godfrey St. Clair's moral vision had fostered in him a kind of mental hypochondria, which threatened to cast a gloom over these first years of his early manhood.

It is far less difficult, at times, to sacrifice an idea than an individual; and, as yet, Sophy had seemed to him a being so ideal and intangible, that she was more like the representation or embodiment of a particular

group of ideas than a creature of flesh and blood. To separate from her was to separate from many pleasant illusions and associations; but 'honour' demanded of him this sacrifice, and he would make it, although with a heavy heart!

When, upon entering his mother's boudoir, he had inquired the whereabouts of his father, it was with the view of submitting to him this new plan of foreign travel. He had not been able, however, to arrange an interview for that evening; but next morning, whilst walking with him up and down the terrace of the wintry flower-garden, he made known his projects for the future. Erskine St. Clair was now a very old man. He had, indeed, been an old man when his son remembered him first, seeming, to him, to embody and represent the civilisation of a departed age. Had he ever been young, and possessed of the faults and failings of other young men? Godfrey had sometimes asked himself. If so, his son had never known him during this passing phase, and as he was now in his seventy-eighth year, all moods and phases would probably soon be over for him. It had ensued, naturally enough, by reason of the great disparity of years, that the two men had had but little in common, notwithstanding that Godfrey had unconsciously formed himself upon his father's example. Neither did there exist between them any outward resemblance to stand in lieu of the more subtle affinity of character. Godfrey was darker and taller than his father had ever been, and his features, although less regular, and wanting in the almost feminine neatness which characterised those of the elder man, were endowed with a certain strange picturesqueness which, to an observer possessed of artistic consciousness, was not

without its especial charm. There was a fire in his eye too, and a dignity in his whole demeanour, which seemed to separate him from the majority of his fellow-creatures, and to bespeak some manner of out-standing from the herd. He might omit, peradventure, to draw upon the intellectual forces which appeared to be lying in reserve; but, ten to one, he would never subside altogether into insignificance.

As they paced slowly up and down the terrace together, arm in arm, Godfrey noticed that his father, old as he had always appeared to him, looked now even older than usual. He observed, too, with pain, that he began to show marked signs of bodily feebleness, walking but slowly, and leaning heavily upon his arm as though for support. He realised how lean and shrivelled he seemed now, compared to what he had appeared to him in his own boyish days, when he had gazed up at him with his earnest child-eyes, and imagined that he was a tall man. He had shrunk and dwindled, however, just like the gray park-wall, once an almost impassable barrier, but sunk now into a thing so small and insignificant that he could easily leap over it.

He realised, too, how thoroughly these few years—a mere nothing in the life of the old man—had, so to speak, reversed their relative positions, transforming himself into the protector, the strong arm, the breadwinner, if need be; and a sentiment of tenderness and compassion possessed him as he felt how his father had now actually need of him to support his tottering footsteps. Then, again, Godfrey was conscious of a decided change in his mental powers. His ideas were no longer so lucid and concise as in the old days, his memory seemed

often to fail him, he repeated himself more than once; and it was evident that, at his advanced age, these changes were likely to be the precursors of that great change which, sooner or later, must come to us all. For a moment this thought caused the young man to falter in his intention of quitting England. As his father seemed, however, rather to encourage the notion, he ended by adhering to it, foreseeing nothing imminent in the gradual breaking up of one whose health was, after all, particularly sound for his years; and before their morning walk was over, the preliminaries had been arranged for his departure.

‘And I desire to tell you, Godfrey, before you go on your travels,’ said the old man kindly, as they were about to separate, ‘that in no way have you ever disappointed either myself or your mother. Since your earliest childhood, you have displayed evidences of an equally-balanced and carefully-regulated mind. In adolescence you have contracted neither vices nor liabilities, and we have every reason to suppose that your tastes are cultivated and refined. Strive, my dear boy, to form your manhood upon the pattern of so exemplary a youth, which has been owing in a great measure, you will admit, to an admirable education. God bless you, my dear boy! I repeat to you, for the second time, that your conduct hitherto has afforded us unmitigated satisfaction.’

‘You are very kind, sir,’ said Godfrey, pressing his arm.

Had this speech been worded differently he would have felt touched and gratified. As it was, the somewhat mechanical treatment of the subject jarred upon him slightly, and he found himself thinking, he knew not why, of Sophy’s childish words, when she had

repeated to him her father's remark about 'the poor boy who was brought up by clockwork;' but then, upon this particular day, he was, perhaps, rather morbid and hypercritical.

That evening, after the candles were lighted, he locked himself up in his room, sat down at his writing-table, and wrote to Sophy. It was a much longer letter than he had ever written before upon the subject of his own impressions; and in order that the reader may be able to judge whether she was rendered any happier by the reception of it, I give it here:—

'I implore of you to pardon me,' he wrote, 'for having given way to violence in your presence. My excuse must be that, feeling provoked, I lost that self-control which I have always counselled others to preserve, and which you reproached me with having maintained until now. In doing this, I fear I have both pained and wounded you; and from what you tell me, it seems that, in this respect, I have unwittingly offended before. I have taken upon myself, also, to advise you upon various subjects—you who, being a woman, are probably perfectly competent to judge for yourself of the fitness of some things, and I perceive that I must have appeared to you to be both dictatorial and impertinent. Remember, however, dear Sophy, that as I am one of your nearest kinsmen, it is not unnatural that I should appear at times to be desirous of usurping the place of a brother in your heart; for to me you have always seemed the sister you would have been indeed had not our two fathers chosen ruthlessly to set aside those natural ties which should have united themselves and their children.'

When Godfrey came to this part of his letter, he felt painfully conscious that he regarded Sophy in no wise in the light of a sister, and that, by asserting that he did so, he was outraging his own uncompromising moral

code. He argued, however, jesuitically, that it was for a good end. It was good for Sophy that she should think of him as a friend only, a kinsman, a brother; and as for himself, what matter whether, to *him*, the thought brought joy or bitterness?

But when the poor little adopted sister herself read these cruel words, she felt a sudden death-chill at her heart. For a few moments it seemed as though it had ceased to beat altogether. She pressed her hand to the place where it was wont to be; but she only felt as if her bosom harboured some dull, inanimate stone, which possessed, nevertheless, a tendency to ache.

‘It is all over!’ she sighed hopelessly, as she gazed out of the bay-window at Little Stillingfleet, towards the winding roadway between the avenue of young trees.

Her blind father, who could not perceive her emotion, and who had been anxiously awaiting, for many days, tidings in confirmation of some grand triumph, connected with one of the numerous ramifications of the Great Cause, pricked up his keen ears as he detected a sound as of the crumpling of note-paper.

‘Can it be,’ he inquired eagerly, ‘that replies to our two latest communications are already in our hands? Our baits have indeed been laid judiciously; and before the period at which inebriated Christians are wont erroneously to celebrate the nativity of the Nazarene, it is my belief that we shall have landed another mighty fish. . . . My last pamphlet upon the Eastern Question has been successfully introduced into the household of a *certain minister*, who is dyspeptic, in the guise of an advertisement for a particular species of dinner-pill, very valuable subject-matter being incorporated with what is, professedly, the encomium of an utterly inno-

cuous simple. . . . This, however, is only the thin end of the wedge. . . . Three of the *khidmutghars* of that very promising young man, Wuzy Ally Khan, have been seduced by our emissary; but there are wheels within wheels; . . . and the reluctance of our old friend, Shah Beharee Lall, to lodge in his bank those thirty lacs of rupees necessary for our expense in Oude, is now thoroughly explained.'

Sophy, however, had never felt less inclined to enter into a discussion upon the Great Cause, and she replied, somewhat impatiently,—

'I wonder whether there will ever dawn a day—a very, very distant one, of course; but still, I can't help thinking, a very happy one—when we shall hear no more of the Eastern Question or the Great Cause?'

The gentle regenerator of the universe was paralysed with astonishment at this unusual display of pettishness. For some moments he could not reply to her question, and he ended, like Jane and Lady Hickathrift, by coming to the conclusion that perhaps his daughter might not be in the enjoyment of her usual health.

But this is a digression, and I must return to Godfrey's letter :—

'I have spoken to my father,' it went on, 'and he approved of my wish to see more of the world; for I informed him that, with his permission, I desired to leave England, and he accorded it at once. When I return, I shall hope to be divested, to some extent, of that "roast-beef-of-old-England cant and clap-trap" which has been till now such a flaw in my character, and which has very justly given you offence. Never, however, has England seemed more dear to me, with some few of its inhabitants, and I shall depart from it with sorrowful regret. Perhaps, like many of the St. Clairs, our

ancestors, I might have gone on living at Dallingridge without ever guessing that I was so grossly prejudiced and unenlightened, had not the veil been torn from my eyes. Thanks to you, however, I have become aware of my ignorance, and am fired with a longing after better things—things wider, deeper, more cosmopolitan. Maybe, where I am going, I may fall in with them. So far, so good; but as you used to say, in those happy days when we were boy and girl together,—

“Ev’ry white must have its black,
And ev’ry sweet its sour;”

and I must confess that I am not over-pleased to learn that Mr. Pettigrew is destined to be the companion of my travels, for (probably without just reason) I have always disliked him. However, it is to the kind solicitude of my father that I owe what I am undutifully disposed to regard as a grievance. I am old enough, it is true, to dispense with the company of my former tutor; and were he to assume the character of mentor, I fear I should be tempted to show some signs of impatience. But when it was simply a question of our travelling together, as any ordinary acquaintances might travel, it was difficult to object, my father himself having started the idea; and as Pettigrew is suffering from a cough, he does not seem averse to a holiday. My father has taken all trouble off his hands with regard to providing old Hornblower with a substitute, and I think we shall start towards the beginning of next week.

‘I must tell you, too, that, before leaving my father, I could not resist an opportunity which presented itself of alluding to our unfortunate family quarrel, and of expressing to him my own feelings upon the subject. I ventured to represent to him that it struck me as being contrary to the laws of Nature and the dictates of true religion, that a feud between two brothers should continue for so many years, particularly when, from the fact of their living so close to

each other, the whole neighbourhood was rendered aware of it; and I ventured to remind him that there is said to be but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The neighbours, I assured him, regarded such an exaggerated display of ill-feeling in the light of a family eccentricity, replete with all the elements of comedy; whilst to myself, I informed him, it seemed to partake more of the nature of a tragedy, bringing painfully to my remembrance the terrible history of that first falling out of brothers which is mentioned in Scripture. When, however, I had proceeded thus far, he became visibly annoyed. Looking at me steadfastly, he begged me, with a commanding gesture, never to speak to him again upon this subject, adding that, did I know the true state of the case, together with certain extraneous circumstances of which he felt almost tempted to inform me, I should certainly have bitten out my own tongue before I made any allusion to the story of Cain and Abel and the first murder. It was not possible for me, after this, to continue the conversation, and I was constrained to change the subject.

‘And now good-bye, dear Sophy, and God bless you! Who can say what changes may have taken place ere we meet again, as I hope we shall meet, in the early spring of next year? You will know, however, with what sincerity I trust that whatever happens may be for your happiness, which, believe me, is as dear to me as my own. Once more, farewell!’

‘P.S. Should you desire to write to me, pray direct under cover to Dr. Dyer at Poynings, with whom I shall be in communication on my father’s account, and who has received instructions to forward my letters. It is my intention to visit, first, the chief cities of France and Germany; later on, I shall proceed to Italy, where I hope to remain for awhile, at Genoa, Milan, Florence, and Rome.’

When Sophy had read through this letter, so chilling in its self-complacent cousinliness, she turned blankly

towards the window, feeling stunned and frozen, and leant for support against the nearest of the three soulless warriors. Clinging thus hopelessly to the hollow steel arm wrought over with golden tracery, and fashioned cunningly to hold something so puissant once at Poitiers or Agincourt, the young girl, whose warm youth was to her at times almost as a burden, a responsibility difficult to deal with aright, seemed suddenly to become as bloodless and inanimate as the armour. The garden looked dismal in its wintry barrenness, and the gray heavens appeared to be leaning down to an earth forlorn and deserted of all pleasant things. Nelus had been sweeping the dead leaves into little damp red heaps opposite to the windows; but others, newly fallen, were scattering themselves all over the lawn, and the footsteps of Winter were no longer to be dissimulated. Before 'the early spring of next year' should have come, with its possible changes, Sophy imagined a long array of days as gray and melancholy as this one; and gazing thus at the desolate landscape, all hopes of a happy future seemed to die out of her heart.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT there is an end to the very gloomiest of days, and no winter, however dismal, endures for ever. In time Spring returned, with her promise of perfect summer. Timidly she came at first, as one that treadeth delicately, with here a peeping blossom, and there a fulness of bud, which to-morrow, perhaps, was destined to be chilled and blighted.

Though it was still early in the month of April, the

sun was sometimes warm enough for Sophy and her father to sit out in the garden, on the southern side of the white farmhouse. Francis St. Clair had looked rather worn and pale of late, and his daughter encouraged him to be as much as possible in the open air. He would, perhaps, have felt insulted had she offered him an overcoat, for to shiver was part of his religion ; but she had craftily disposed the garden-chairs, so that they were sheltered from the cold winds in a little nook between one of the angles of the house and the conservatory, and here they would often sit together and converse, more after the manner of brother and sister than of father and child.

Sophy did not expect that Godfrey would return till the beginning of May—nearly another whole month to wait—but still it was pleasant to feel that she was waiting for him, and watching, so it seemed to her, every little bud and blossom opening to welcome him home.

Perhaps, though she was far from suspecting it, she herself was partly responsible for her father's careworn expression. He had been disappointed at the failure of Thomas Hickathrift's suit, although, in cherishing the idea of this marriage, he had not been actuated by motives of worldly wisdom. Poynings Abbey, indeed, with its historic memories and surrounding broad acres, counted for little in the mind of one who was constitutionally incapable of estimating social advantages even at their true value. Francis St. Clair had been, all his life, a dreamer of dreams, an enthusiastic follower of an obscure and mysterious philosophy, irrational and impracticable perhaps, but bringing with it, at any rate, one palpable advantage, or disadvantage. The common things, to which common people are wont to attach undue importance, appeared in his eyes ridiculously small and

insignificant. Wealth, position, a fine estate, were to him as so many things of naught. But he desired to see his daughter provided for in his own lifetime. He would have liked to know that her future would be happy, peaceful, and respectable, and, by her union with Sir Thomas Hickathrift, he had fancied that such a future would be assured to her.

Even Sophy herself could not help missing Tom's constant visits. Out of loyalty to the man she loved, she had striven to avoid his society of late, though she secretly confessed that this faithful friend, with his honest retriever-face, might have been in some sort a consoler to her, and even a distraction, during the absence of Godfrey, had he not foolishly forfeited her confidence by loving 'not wisely, but too well.'

Still, this very love of her, although it was not wholly reciprocated, had not been without its effect. It had touched her very considerably, and she could not help feeling for her rejected suitor a compassion, half tender, even if it was a little contemptuous.

The first time that the first wooer informs a maiden that he loves her, must always mark an epoch in her existence; an episode to be cherished, remembered, and gone over, in fancy, again and again, although she may have wished at the time (as is often the case) that the flattering words had been uttered by somebody else. For is it not her first real conquest of that formidable natural antagonist, Man, with which has come to her the consciousness of her beauty, her dominion, her womanhood? Therefore, if it be nothing more, a declaration of undying affection, to the simple-hearted girl who does not altogether expect it, is at least a revelation. There are revelations, however, which are only *half* revelations; and though the semblance of the

truth may come to us, it is possible that it may not be what children call '*the real truth*,' after all. Still Tom's proposal was an event in Sophy's life, and the situation, at any rate, had been romantic.

'It all looks so peaceful and lovely to-day,' she said to her father, as she gazed musingly at the distant landscape. 'I think I like this view better than that from the other side, where all the lines seem to go too much the same way, like the lines of a copy-book.'

'I used to admire both views when I could see them,' he answered, rather sadly; 'but *now* the two are the same.'

'Ah, but your eyes will come all right soon, and then you will see and admire them again. I have noticed lately that you've looked as if you could see.' Somehow, to-day, she seemed hopeful and cheerful about everything.

'I shall never see again,' said the blind man, sighing. "'In this instance alone"' (as Milton replied to the invectives of Salmasius), "and much against my inclination, I am a deceiver."'

'Oh, but I feel sure that you will,' exclaimed Sophy consolingly. 'Janus says she once knew a man who told stories, and didn't believe in the Bible, and who was struck blind; but as soon as he repented and spoke the truth, and became a Methodist preacher, he got all right again, and saw better than ever.'

'And I have heard tell of another man,' said the philosopher, smiling, 'who lost his eyes through jumping into a quickset hedge, but who recovered his sight as soon as he jumped into another.'

'You are making fun of me,' cried Sophy, feigning displeasure; 'so I shall change the subject. . . How I *should* like to have a statue or a sun-dial put up between

those two curly-shaped borders! A fountain would look too cockneyfied; besides which, we haven't enough water: but it seems so to cry out for some sort of sticking-up monument or pillar.'

'It would be a delightful spot to be buried in,' remarked Mr. St. Clair, reflectively. 'If, indeed, one *must* be buried at all—and I suppose it would offend people were one to be singular with regard to one's mode of sepulture—what one would desire, if burial is imperatively necessary, would be merely to be laid at rest near to the place which had held most of one's joys and sorrows in life. Afterwards, you might put over the place some simple monument, so as not to forget it, and to break, as you say, the "lines of the copy-book."'

'Those are on the other side,' Sophy answered. 'And now, what can you possibly mean by talking in this foolish way? I suppose you wish to trade upon my feelings,' she added, gulping down a sob, and her eyes filling with tears.

"No man knows where he shall die," rejoined her father, apologetically, quoting from the *Koran*. 'Neither can one be sure at what *moment* one may be called away. All I meant was, that if such a thing could be, without giving fuss or trouble, I would so much rather lie *here* than in the damp church-vault at Dallingridge.' And he pointed with his thin hand towards the place where Sophy had said she wished for a sun-dial.

'How ridiculous!' she exclaimed, almost angrily, though it was fortunate that the blind man could not see the tears which came to her eyes. 'You are perfectly well and strong; although, of course, if you ever *did* die, no one would mind the "fuss and trouble," as you call it, of burying you as you liked.'

‘The parsons would stand in your way,’ he answered regretfully. ‘They wouldn’t allow anything unorthodox; the Dean, Hornblower, Pettigrew—the whole lot of them—would insist upon carting me off to the family vault.’

‘They shan’t do it! I won’t let them!’ cried Sophy passionately, throwing her arms round his neck. ‘But why has our conversation taken this melancholy turn?’

She might well ask this; it was destined, however, to be interrupted shortly by Jane, who, appearing round the sunlit angle of the wall, informed them ‘as how a person’ was waiting to speak to ‘missy,’ and that it was ‘very particular.’

This person was no other than Mrs. Weller, of Great Stillingfleet, arrayed in her Sunday shawl and black coalscuttle bonnet—an heirloom once in the family of almost every English cottar, but now, like the tall Welsh beaver hat, rapidly becoming obsolete. At sight of her Sophy could not restrain a shudder. This old woman, who had hitherto asserted her individuality chiefly upon the occasion of inconvenient births, or who treated Little Stillingfleet as a pleasant half-way house when returning from a neighbouring ‘laying-out,’ appeared almost in the light of some sinister bird of ill-omen.

‘What is it, Mrs. Weller?’ she now asked, feeling a little nervous.

‘Moises, he be very bad, he be,’ answered the shepherd’s wife, alluding to her son of birds’-nesting proclivities, now a grown-up labourer upon the Dallingridge estate. ‘He bin gone and got bit in one of his wristes along on a deaf arder.’

‘There’s no such thing as a deaf adder,’ said Sophy,

feeling relieved. 'What you call a deaf adder is only a slow-worm, and how do you know that is deaf?'

Mrs. Weller could not answer her, as she was amongst the most ignorant of women.

'He must have been bitten by a common adder,' Sophy went on. 'How did it happen?'

'Deaf arder she wur a curling up down among de fern-scrubs,' explained Mrs. Weller, wiping her eyes. 'Deaf un she wur! My son Moises, he goes fur to grub up de old privets, and sets his bill-hook down on its middle like, fur to kill un. Whilst he bin arter scranching on her, deaf un she screels up de bill-hook, and ketches my son Moises in de arm.'

'Ah, Moses was always fond of torturing animals, and now you see how he's punished! If he had at once killed the adder in a merciful manner, who knows if this would have happened? But I hope you have sent for a doctor?'

Mrs. Weller replied that she had at once despatched a neighbour, 'wot ran messengers,' for the new medical man from London, lately established at Poynings, but that she had been informed that he was up at the great house with 'de ole gen'leman,' who was 'as bad as bad,' and that the object of her present visit was to beg for the loan of one of the farm-carts, in order that Moses might be conveyed to Southerbourne to see a doctor, and also to be 'dipped' in the sea, to which operation the peasants 'in dese parts' attach considerable importance, as a remedy either for snake-bite or hydrophobia.

'You mean my uncle, I suppose?' Sophy inquired anxiously. 'It is the beginning of the end,' she thought in her heart.

'De ole gen'leman up at the great house, he wur took bad last forenoon, he wur,' answered Mrs. Weller,

who had seated herself whilst the cart was being prepared. 'Some do say it be de paraletics; anyhow, right arm and hand on un be struck like dumbified, and he be took light-headed in all his limbs.'

'How dreadful! And can nothing be done for him?'

'Bless you, missy,' replied Mrs. Weller, 'dey hevs all that gold can buy, dey hevs. And de man wot runs messengers goes so fur as to say as how young muster's bin sent fur, he do.'

At this unexpected mention of 'young muster,' Sophy's sentiments underwent a sudden change. Compassion for the sufferings of the 'ole gen'leman,' for Moses Weller, and any resentment she might have felt towards the 'deaf arder,' which had so disapproved of being 'scratched' that it had 'screeled' and bitten, vanished in an instant; and her heart began to beat so violently that, had not the noise of the cart-wheels sounded at this moment, she fancied that Mrs. Weller must have heard it. The worthy woman, however, was far too much absorbed in the sufferings of her son to pay attention to the emotions of others. As soon as she was safely established in the cart, Sophy flew off to tell her father the news.

'And I can't help thinking,' she said at the end of her recital, 'that you ought now to make up this foolish quarrel. It will be "now or never," dear; for he is evidently dying, and you may be sorry if you don't.'

'I have always endeavoured to act justly and uprightly towards my brother,' answered the blind man nervously. 'Our characters were uncongenial, and jarred upon each other. As it was impossible that we could ever become friends, we parted company; and I think I may say that, on *my* side, at least, it was without bitterness.'

‘No, it wasn’t,’ answered his daughter firmly. ‘It was with a great deal, which, ever since that time, has been growing and growing, until you—who, upon most subjects, are so clever, and open to conviction—became quite prejudiced and silly about this. *Everybody noticed it.*’

‘Who can have noticed it?’ inquired the philosopher earnestly. He was wounded at being reproached with being ‘prejudiced and silly.’

‘Never mind,’ answered Sophy, making use of a truly feminine resource. ‘Besides,’ she added, turning her argument in another direction, ‘although we don’t belong to any established religion, you know that’s only because no religion seems good enough for us. We fancy that they’re too small and narrow for our grand views, and we’ve read of all their cruelties and persecutions. But still, in the *English religion*, they preach charity and goodwill towards one’s neighbour—Tom Hickathrift has told me so, and I’ve often seen it in books; and if *even a Christian* would go and see his dying brother, surely an *Agnostic* ought to do so several times.’

‘I shall never see him again,’ answered the blind man, as he commenced drawing upon the gravel with his walking-stick.

‘Never mind that,’ said his daughter cheerfully, ‘It isn’t so much the *seeing*. I could lead you up to his bedside, and you could say a few kind words.’

‘Nothing is so unprofitable as a deathbed reconciliation. Well enough had we been able to agree during our lives.’

‘Perhaps there may have been faults on both sides,’ said Sophy, encouraged by his manner. ‘But *now* surely it’s time to bury the hatchet. Besides, I don’t

feel at all sure that he wouldn't have come to see you if you'd been ill.'

'I'm sure I hope he would not,' replied her father hastily. 'Why should we be condemned during illness to associate with those we could not endure in health?'

'You mean that it might make one worse? Well, happily you are in the very rudest possible health. But still I see that you are what the Christians call "stiff-necked" ("neckèd," I think it is generally pronounced); and I am afraid, with all your softness of manner, that you are in reality very hard-hearted.'

'I hope I am not,' replied he, taking her hand.

'Very well, then,' said Sophy, seeing her advantage; 'shall I go and fetch some ink and writing-paper?'

'I don't quite know what you want me to do.'

'I want you to write a letter to your brother, or, rather, you shall dictate it, whilst I write. Say a few kind words to him, and tell him you'll come and see him if he likes; and then you shall sign it.' So saying, she was off like an arrow from the bow to fetch the writing materials.

Sophy St. Clair was at that happy age when letter-writing is a pleasure in itself, independent of all subject-matter. She wrote a beautifully clear hand, and delighted in flourishing the graceful tails of her *y*'s, and slashing across the necks of her inoffensive *t*'s. Choosing, therefore, a new crowquill-pen, of her own manufacture, she sat down beside her father, and wrote as follows at his dictation:—

'My daughter and myself have just heard that you are ill. In illness, things which seemed once to be important fade often and become as nothing before newly-awakened thoughts of deeper mysteries. If it is thus with you, the heartburnings of the past are, maybe, forgotten; and I am

willing, should you care to see me, to show you that *I* too can forget.'

Thus ended the letter, or, rather, thus ended Francis St. Clair's dictation.

But the sole secretary of a blind man, particularly one of the female sex, must be singularly conscientious if she does not, now and then, endeavour to improve and soften down his phraseology according to her own ideas; and Sophy was not altogether proof against this temptation, though she yielded to it from purely benevolent motives. Thus, at the commencement, she had written, 'My daughter and myself have just heard that you are ill *with the deepest regret*' (surely a much kinder way of putting it). Further on she had improved 'I am willing' into 'I am *most* willing;' whilst after 'forget' at the end of the letter, she had added the word '*everything*,' and this she had twice underlined.

'And now you can sign it,' she said, arranging the letter before him. 'And mind, dear, to hold your hand as if you were writing *downwards*, otherwise all your letters run up to the right in such a ridiculous way.'

The blind man did as he was bidden, and, having succeeded in obtaining a very creditable signature, nothing now remained but to despatch the letter. To Sophy's annoyance Nelus happened to be from home; and as Jane was now anything but fleet-footed, and occupied, besides, with household affairs, there was nothing for it but to confide the mission to Abdallah. For Abdallah, the Egyptian donkey-boy, who, when only in his thirteenth year, had assisted at Sophy's nativity in the city whence she derived her name, was still an occupant of the white-gabled farmhouse, which seemed now to possess for him the same charm that had hitherto prevented any of the other few retainers

from quitting it, and had lured back again and again the guests who had visited it once.

The time had long gone by when it had been settled that he should return to the flesh-pots of Egypt, although a conscientious protector had been found for him, even in the person of the Great Prophet himself, who was upon the point of revisiting the East. At the last moment, however, he had seemed to be seized with an intense unwillingness to depart, and, after singing a melancholy song of farewell, accompanied by music upon a '*tar*,' or tumtum, he complained of illness, and had remained for some time groaning upon his bed. Days passed by, and still he appeared to be oppressed with despairing melancholy; and the Great Prophet, tired of waiting, went on his journey wondering and alone. Then, and then only, did the Egyptian recover his usual health and spirits; and Sophy, who, looking upon him merely in the light of a passing visitor, had never permitted him to become essential to her happiness, began to fear that he intended making Little Stillingfleet his permanent home. And, indeed, whenever she had made any inquiries relative to the time of his departure, his answers were always ambiguous in the extreme.

'When my beard is of the length of the beard of the Effendi,' he had replied when she questioned him for the first time in the presence of her father, who had interpreted to her the meaning of his words; whilst, upon another occasion, he had indicated, as the moment of his probable departure, 'When the nails of the fingers of my hands shall be even as the talons of the eagle.' Lastly, he had dismissed the subject by exclaiming, with indignation, 'May the salt be in the eye of whosoever shall depart from a just master!' So that there seemed to

be every chance of his remaining where he was for the present. In the neighbourhood he was spoken of indiscriminately as 'the Frenchman,' 'the Turk,' 'the Nigger,' 'the Ingin,' and 'the Devil'—this last appellation having been conferred upon him, not unnaturally, in consequence of his having devoured live coals after the manner of the dancing dervishes; he had also performed a charm for the extirpation of bugs in one of the outlying cottages, which, having most unexpectedly succeeded in its object, caused him to be regarded as a supernatural being.* The chawbacons of the neighbourhood, consisting of the 'Stubberfieldiuses,' the boys at the turnpike, and Moses Weller, before Nemesis overtook him in the guise of a 'deaf arder,' having begun by taunting him, and provoking him to unequal combat, with the view, apparently, of 'larning' him 'for being a toäd,' had come to regard him, by-and-by, with that toleration tempered with contempt which one is apt to feel for a creature of clouded intellect who seems to be striving, as it were, after the light. Later on, however, he had unconsciously succeeded in securing the respect due to all those who maintain with consistency the courage of their opinions; and some few words of newly-acquired 'pidgen English' ensuing on the top of this respect, left him master of the situation. Behold him, then, Oriental as ever in many, even *too* many, of his habits, adapting himself with singular docility to the prejudices and eccentricities of the northern Franks. He was distinguished from them, however, by many points of dissimilarity; and

* This charm consists of the following words from the Koran, chap. ii. v. 244, written in separate letters: 'Hast thou not considered those who left their habitations, and they were thousands, for fear of death? And God said unto them, Die, die, die!'

as Sophy reflected upon some of these, she could not help wishing that she had possessed a less sensational mode of conveying her letter, for she rightly conjectured that her uncle might possibly have exaggerated the unconventionalities of Little Stillingfleet, and she had no wish to parade any of them before him. She remembered, however, that the sick man would be, of necessity, confined to his chamber, where his wife was probably in close attendance upon him; and her straining after civilisation had not yet so far demoralised her as to cause her to attach any importance to the feelings of the 'pampered menial' who might chance to answer the door-bell at Dallingridge House.

There was no time to be lost, and in the course of about twenty minutes Abdallah, turbaned and kaftaned, started off at a brisk gallop upon 'Cammy,' whose long tail, mingling with the folds of his rider's white *abayah*, floated picturesquely in the breeze.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHILST these first signs of a chilly and reluctant spring, with its pale one-sided sunshine, were gladdening Sophy's heart in England, and seeming to awaken the hopes which had been frozen to sleep in the winter, Godfrey St. Clair was basking in the lighter atmosphere of the Riviera, which has the effect, generally, of arousing the dormant senses of the apathetic Briton to a consciousness of fuller life and enjoyment.

Since his departure from England, Godfrey had felt thus imperceptibly aroused and awakened by each new revelation of sight and sound he encountered; but he was uncertain whether this was entirely due to

atmospheric causes, or to a sense of emancipation from the cold surroundings of his home, which, joined to the effect produced by Sophy's shafts directed at his reticence, had piqued him into endeavouring to live with more intensity. For he had certainly left England, more or less, in a fit of pique; and there were even moments when his uncongenial companion was tempted to question him as to his varied alternations of mood. Something, however, in the young man's manner dissuaded him; and, perhaps, two persons more utterly disunited in spirit had never journeyed together. There had not existed any sympathy between Godfrey and his tutor even in the old days, when they had been thrown together by reason of their relative positions; but the young are frequently unappreciative of their 'pastors and masters' exertions for their welfare, and it was to have been expected that this personal antipathy would have worn off with the years. Singularly enough, however, Godfrey's dislike seemed only to have ripened with time, and the verdict of his maturer judgment was but the echo of his boyish opinion. Hitherto, there had been nothing in Pettigrew's conduct to justify what might have been merely an unreasonable prejudice. But it almost appeared as if these two fellow-travellers had, since their departure from England, flung aside simultaneously some mask or cloak wherein they had each of them been shrouded until now. It is said that one of the unmistakable signs of being what is called 'a good fellow' (often a very ambiguous term of recommendation) consists in the fact that the person thus designated may be accompanied on journeys with impunity, and without irritation to the feelings of his travelling companion; and it was when tried in the balance by this standard that Felix Pettigrew was

unquestionably 'found wanting.' With such a companion it was not possible for Godfrey to have much in common; and it was with feelings of gall and bitterness that he had journeyed thus far with his unsympathetic 'bear-leader.' Why, indeed, he asked himself, need he have been hampered with a bear-leader at all? He had arrived fully at years of discretion, and was unprepared to alter in any respect his mode of procedure, even if Pettigrew had ventured to suggest it. Perhaps, however, from his father's point of view, he was still a schoolboy, standing in need of Mr. Pettigrew's fuller judgment and experience; for it is with difficulty that Age dissociates the idea of folly and hot-headedness from its estimate of Youth. Be this how it may, Pettigrew's society was utterly distasteful to him; and he decided in his own mind that they should part company as soon as they reached Genoa, to meet again, perhaps, some weeks later, in order that they might arrive in England together; and having matured this project without mentioning it to the curate, he journeyed on fiercely and eagerly.

But he had another reason for wishing to push on as quickly as possible. At Genoa he made sure that he should find a letter from Sophy, for he had not heard from her as yet, and her silence affected him more than he could have anticipated. He began, in fact, to realise how much more to him than he had imagined was this wild woodland cousin; how much more, too, she had seemed a part of his own existence since he had seen the possibility of her passing out of it altogether; and he asked himself, over and over again, whether he had not acted in a somewhat Quixotic manner, in thus leaving the coast clear for the approach of a rival.

His way lay along the beautiful Corniche road, bounded on the left by rich groves of olives and oranges, from beneath which a newly-opened scarlet anemone flashed forth here and there, from amongst its earlier brethren of the purple, whilst the air was laden with the odours of violets, starch hyacinths, and mignonette. On his right, he perceived the wide expanse of blue tideless ocean, its waves seeming as though wearied through battling with the fierce equinoctial gales, and scarcely now finding strength to kiss languidly the shores of the sunlit bays, palm-tufted, and bristling with aloes and prickly pears. Thinking always of England, he gazed dreamily over the glittering water, whilst his unsympathetic companion dozed on in a corner of the britzka, and they passed thus, in due course, the beautiful islands of Ste. Marguerite and St. Honorat. A rosy sunset lit up the sheer crag of Ste. Marguerite, in front of the blue line of stone-pines; and the postilion, having pointed out its fortress as sometime the prison-house of the unfortunate 'man with the iron mask,' he remembered that Sophy had likened him to that mysterious individual, and felt that he was passing what had once been the abode of a friend. It was with a feeling of relief that he crossed the Var bridge, and found himself, for the first time, upon what was then Italian soil. The news of a victory of the King of Sardinia over the 'Tedeschi' had just been received, and the town of Nice was brilliantly illuminated. Revellers paraded the streets, bawling forth patriotic songs; and, as it happened to be also about the time of the Carnival, many of them were tricked out as for a masquerade. National guards—some of them belonging to the best families in the place—occupied the sentry-boxes in front of the public

buildings, in lieu of the gallant green-feathered bersaglieri, who had departed to seek either glory or the grave; and the whole population appeared to be in an abnormal state of turmoil and excitement.

This circumstance furnished Godfrey with an excuse for curtailing his stay in the town. By next day at noon he had seen most of the sights worthy of a visit—the Roman amphitheatre at Cimiez, the castle, the Jewish cemetery, and the new quays, at which the convicts, in their red caps and prison dresses, were hard at work in the sunshine—and towards evening he was enabled to set forth again upon his journey. This sudden departure from a civilised town seemed to be the occasion of much annoyance to Mr. Pettigrew. The curate had, indeed, been exceedingly fractious of late, and his companion could only explain his behaviour by concluding that the change of climate had affected his nerves. It turned out, however, that there was a more serious cause for his irritability. After leaving Nice he became really indisposed, sickening hour by hour, until, when actually within sight of the lighthouse at Genoa, Godfrey was obliged, in the interests of common humanity, to come to a halt, a violent feverish attack having declared itself, which rendered it dangerous for the curate to proceed. He was indeed half-delirious already, and his excited gestures had collected a small crowd round the carriage; when, perceiving by the wayside, in the midst of the village at which they were stopping, a commodious-looking inn, which, judging by the armorial bearings sculptured over its *porte-cochère*, seemed to have been at one time the palazzo of some distinguished family, Godfrey proceeded at once to engage rooms for the night, having despatched his servant on to Genoa,

with orders to bring back a doctor as soon as possible, and to inquire for letters at the post-office.

The inn at which the travellers alighted had indeed been a palace, belonging once to the Doria family. Its apartments were marble-paved and magnificent, its fare scanty, and its landlord handsome, good-tempered, and incompetent. It stood in the principal street or road-way of the village of Pegli, at this time a mere hamlet devoted to fishing and shipbuilding, but seeming now to have become a suburb of Genoa, united to it by the connecting links of Sestri and Cornigliano. As soon as they had taken possession of their quarters Godfrey assisted Pettigrew to bed, in an apartment of spacious dimensions, paved with black marble, and having a ceiling richly ornamented with paintings in fresco, but which was devoid of all furniture, save a high Venetian mirror, a small pallet, a rude fire-stove, and a rush-bottomed chair. He was aided in his philanthropic endeavours by an aged chambermaid, bent, wrinkled, and bearded, who seemed to converse in no known tongue, and notwithstanding her great age, to do nearly all the work of the house.

The landlord, a good-looking young Milanese, smelling of garlic and bad tobacco, condescended, it is true, to assist personally at Godfrey's evening repast; but he did so more with the manner of a familiar friend pressing a somewhat fastidious guest, than of an obsequious attendant. Godfrey found that he was particularly well informed upon most subjects, except those which would have seemed to come especially under his notice. Now and then, during the meal, he appeared fatigued, flung himself upon a chair, mopped his face with a table-napkin, and went off into a rhapsody. Art, love, metaphysics, poetry, and theology, seemed

to be, one and all of them, at the ends of his dirty bejewelled fingers, though upon questions which would have lain next the heart of an English 'mine host' he appeared to be lamentably ignorant. The young traveller was perhaps fastidious, more from the effects of his meditations than by reason of the badness of his dinner. Unconsciously, as he made a pretence of tasting, in the first place, some greasy soup—a helping of *loup de mer* (a coarse Mediterranean fish, 'cousin in the first degree' to our freshwater jack), and some portion of a battlemented tower, composed of rice and garlic, wherein a couple of sparrows had been immured, half-fledged, wide-mouthed, and lamentably spare of flesh for all their scavengering—his thoughts took a morbid and melancholy turn, as though in anticipation of some impending catastrophe.

It was late before his servant returned with the expected *medico*. To Godfrey's disappointment, he brought no letter from Sophy. There was, however, one from his mother, and another from her to Mr. Pettigrew, as he perceived by the handwriting. This letter he set aside until the invalid should be in a fit state to read it, and he proceeded to open his own with no very great impatience, for he did not anticipate that it would contain news of any interest. It proved, however, to be a letter of some importance, as it gave him the first intelligence of his father's indisposition. It ran as follows:—

'DEAR GODFREY,—I am sorry to tell you that your father is not very well. Some days ago he injured his right arm accidentally, so that he cannot now hold his pen nor occupy himself as usual. The cold winds have kept him to the house, and he is somewhat depressed in mind. I will write

again in a few days ; for should he continue in his present state, it would be perhaps as well that you should return at once. Wait, however, until you receive a second letter from me. I may perhaps write to-morrow, should there be any decided change.'

It was impossible for Godfrey not to feel anxious after reading this. He had cared for his father as much as he had been permitted to care, and he foresaw, as Sophy had foreseen, that this illness was probably 'the beginning of the end.' So strongly was he possessed with this consciousness that, had it not been for Pettigrew's inopportune attack of fever, he would have started at once on his return journey to England, whither his heart was already winging his way. He hardly liked, however, notwithstanding the small amount of sympathy with which the curate inspired him, to abandon him—to die, perhaps—in a foreign land, and he decided, therefore, to await the arrival of his mother's second letter ; for he doubted not that it would reach him on the morrow, and that by then the doctor would be better able to judge of his companion's condition.

In the meantime, Pettigrew had of course gone through the national process of blood-letting, for his medical attendant was a determined follower of Dr. Sangrado, and he lay now in what appeared to be a kind of stupor, his face looking pale and attenuated. There is no doubt but that an illness may often invest with temporary dignity—in no way comparable with the solemn majesty of Death—the countenance which has before seemed commonplace and insignificant ; and Godfrey, contemplating the prostrate figure of his former tutor, could not help feeling this. In the position in which he was lying,

Pettigrew's features appeared to be regularly and delicately moulded, and his physiognomy, now that it was in perfect repose, was possessed of a certain air of culture and refinement. The disciple of Sangrado had quitted the apartment to partake of a *réchauffé* of the battlemented tower, and the young man found himself alone with the invalid. Lying upon the one solitary chair, he espied his mother's letter. It was still unopened, and fearing lest it might be mislaid before the sick man was well enough to read it, he was about to put it in a place of safety, when he caught sight of the postmark, and perceived that the date on it was two days later than that of his own letter.

'Probably,' thought he, 'this letter contains the latest news of my father;' and the fact that it was addressed to Pettigrew, instead of to himself, filled him at once with ominous forebodings. Not a moment was to be lost, as, supposing that it contained bad news, it might be necessary for him to set off immediately for England; but the doctor had left orders that Pettigrew was on no account to be disturbed.

In these circumstances Godfrey St. Clair committed what must be always an error of judgment. He opened and read, with the best possible intentions, a letter which was addressed to another person. The rash act brought with it its own punishment. These were the words which confronted him upon breaking the seal:—

'He has rallied, so there is now no immediate hurry; nevertheless, make this an excuse to return, if you possibly can, for no words can say how I miss you. Could he have been suspicious when he insisted that you should go abroad? He is altogether very tiresome, and has been annoying me by threatening to tell G. the family secret. ELIZA.'

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After reading these words Godfrey flung the letter from him as though it had been a serpent ; and as he passed the high Venetian mirror on his way out of the apartment, he saw that his face looked like the face of a corpse.

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON :
Printed by STRANGEWAYS & SONS, Tower Street, Upper St. Martin's Lane.

